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ALBERTA

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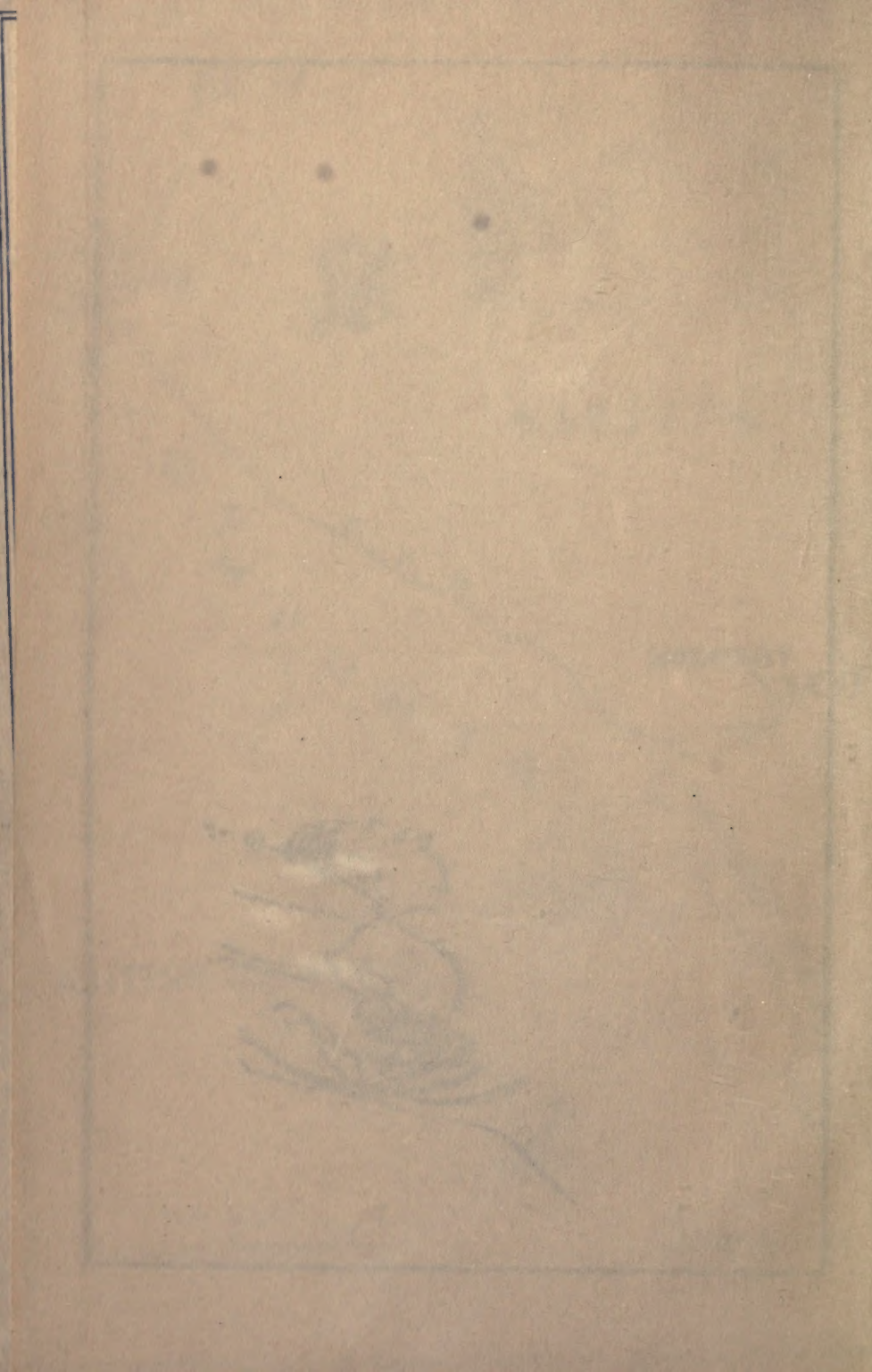


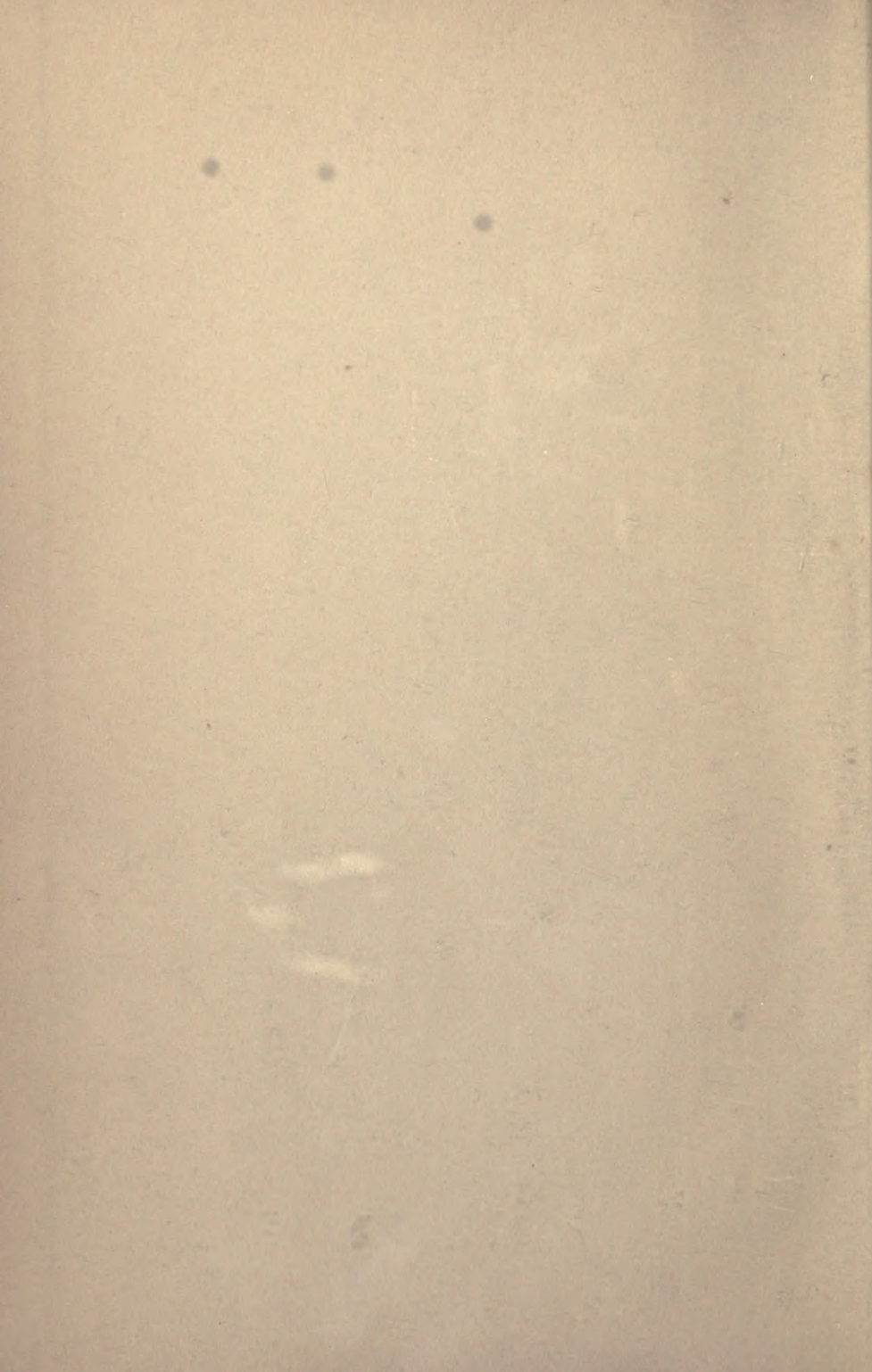
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ESCAPE ON SKIS





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ESCAPE ON SKIS

by

BRIAN
MEREDITH



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Preface

by Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery, P.C., M.P.

SOME years ago I took my young friend, Brian Meredith, "wandering starry eyed among the mountains," to use his own phrase, and was by way of teaching him how to find a sure and never-failing way of escape by pitting hand and foot and ice-axe against rock and ice. But after a fortnight he eluded me, having some sort of so-called urgent work to do, and a still untrained and too exacting conscience. Since then he has broken loose and has found an alternative way of escape in ski-ing. Whether it be a better alternative, whether he is right in affirming that "Winter is the most wonderful of the seasons," and the mountains in winter "exciting, living things," in an even higher degree than in summer, I am not prepared, here at any rate, to say with any confidence. I know I agree with him when I am ski-ing in a dazzling and fantastic world of white and blue. I also know that I hold on to the older faith, in spirit as well as with fingers and toes, when ridge and wall of richly coloured sun-warmed rock point upwards to some incredibly soaring summit, and all the valley lies green far below my feet.

Anyhow, Brian Meredith has found his own way of escape, and these pages tell you of his pilgrimage, by way of the Rockies and the Alps, to that inner peace that can co-exist so perfectly with those breathless alternatives of delirious joy, false pride, base terror and ludicrous ignominy which the ski-runner knows so well. This is not one of those many admirable works which, with the help of much scientific explanation and innumerable diagrams, tell you all the complicated movements you must keep in

mind simultaneously during the split second when you are trying to do a ski turn. Nor is it one of those no less admirable definite accounts of definite alpine ski expeditions which set a beacon before the aspiring beginner. No one will derive from it the least assistance in doing even a stem turn, or in finding his way between any two of the places described in the mountains of either hemisphere.

But for those who live in outer darkness and wish to know what ski-ing feels like, or to those children of light who know, but love to renew the old familiar thrills, this is just the book. The whole essence of what the author sums up as "the most exciting and satisfactory way of travelling" is here distilled in a narrative which resembles a good day on skis for its delightfully inconsequent variety, its joyous incidents, and its absence of any set purpose outside the story itself. But for those, still able-bodied, who are determined never to ski, or never to ski again, and who think they have no need for "escape," I would strongly deprecate the study of so infectiously enthusiastic a votary of the wing-footed sport:

"Beware, beware,
His flashing eyes, his floating hair.

.
For he on honeydew has fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

L. S. AMERY.

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Part One

“Young Man Gone West”





Chapter One

YOU LOUSE YOU

I

I REGAINED my breath and looked at the landscape. There was a lot of it, and it seemed very far below. I kicked my skis emphatically to clear the snow from the running surfaces, and looked as if I were impatient to start downhill. In reality I was afraid I would slip.

My mind ran something like this:

This is all very beautiful, but you are a fool. This is an amazing view back over the Bow Valley towards Lake Louise; yes, just look at it; but you are a fool, you are tired, and you are frightened. You have never, ever, seen such mountains, such snow-fields, such scenery as you are seeing at this instant, but your knees are wobbling, your heart is thumping and you are no more a skier than you are a ventriloquist. You are shivering not because you are cold or tired from climbing, but because you are scared: you are a louse.

Far below me tiny black figures stood out against the whiteness of the snow. One of them waved, and minutes later the ghost of a cry came up to me. From just above tracks in the snow showed where they had been, and from where they had headed down the hill in a series of runs and swings until they had dropped over the crest of a steeper descent.

You are a louse. You are, moreover, a yellow-bellied louse, and you've got to ski down there. Look, they're waiting for you, and watching. Go on, don't jitter any more. Get going.

The reader may argue that I was severe with myself,

but I had to be. My ego had to be called a louse until it got fed up and said it wasn't. Then it moved.

All right then, I'm not a louse. Here goes.

My ski tips pointed downhill and sank in the deep powder snow. The snow piled up in front of my feet and held me back as I started to slide. It made me stagger and start to plunge forward. I was not accustomed to such deep snow, and to have my ski points vanish in the whiteness as they did was like finding that the front of my car had disappeared in a fog.

Hold up, you fool, don't stagger. Keep your feet. Stick to it. You'll make it.

I was moving faster now, and the resistance of the snow seemed less. The tip of my skis broke the surface of the snow ahead of me, and as the pace increased they floated higher, like an aquaplane gathering speed.

Look, you're making it. You're doing fine. You're not a louse. You're magnificent . . . magnificent. Now stem. You must turn soon.

As I changed from being a louse into a daring marvel, into something God-like and heroic, I was caught up for several seconds in the thrill that makes ski-ing what it is. The moment of ecstasy that justifies almost the whole fantastic business was mine. I was floating now on top of the snow. I could feel it speeding beneath my skis, hear it hissing past as I cut down through the surface, imagine it pluming high behind me like the wake of a racing motor-boat. The wind streamed against my face. My pulse was galloping with excitement.

Turn now, turn, you fool. Put all your weight on that outside ski. Stem with it, lean over it. Hold on.

I was on the crest of the steepest slope now, and the figures at the bottom resolved themselves into recognizable friends waiting a hundred yards ahead and below me. The gradient dropped more quickly away. It looked like a cliff. My heart was wedged behind my back teeth.

Hold up. Hold up, you louse you . . . oh, help . . .

My feet began to wobble separately, and individually. They were wide apart, and they tried to go wider. My





fall began a good twenty yards before I finally disappeared. There was a great explosion of snow.

And just what I thought and probably said out loud when I emerged, completely unharmed, is not to be printed.

Jim Boyce, the guide, was standing over me.

"That was swell," he said laconically. "You were below the surface for a good five minutes. We got you coming up for the second time.'}

II

I was ski-ing for the first time in the High Country, in that alpine Never-Never-Land above the tree-line. I was in the Canadian Rockies in winter.

Since then I have skied a lot more above the tree-line and below it, and I manage a little better, and don't fall so spectacularly. But fundamentally I have tried to be a tourist or a hiker on skis rather than an expert in any one form of technique. I have skied a couple of hundred miles in the Canadian Rockies. I have covered a much greater distance, probably, in the Alps of Switzerland.

Does it interest you, even though perhaps you have never seen skis, or snow? It's just like canoeing, or riding, or bicycling through the country. It's a perfect way of travelling, and it has given me much happiness.

I am itching to write about it, about the travelling more than the ski-ing. Are you with me?

I have got to persuade you, if you are to follow me into this book, that winter is the most wonderful of the seasons; that snow is beautiful, as beautiful as the ocean or the sky or the sands of the desert; and that high mountains in winter are exciting, living things to have about one.

Though I have my moments of doubt, I believe all this, for I am young, and I am Canadian. Winter, the snows of winter, and the special things associated with it like ski-ing and sleigh-bells, and the smell of wood-smoke, are part of the pattern of my life. I need it, hunger for it, and if the season in another country does not behave as it does in my own, I feel the world has become unbalanced.

You, personally, may be miserable in winter. If you

live in England, I don't wonder, for there the winter is to be endured and not enjoyed, and it is immoral to be comfortable within-doors. If you live in Canada and don't like it, then you are old, or you are not a skier.

You can't be slightly daft about it, as I pretend to be. You can't, unless you *use* winter. But perhaps you can sympathize with my viewpoint.

There really is a magic to it. People wouldn't go to Switzerland, head out by tens of thousands into the Laurentians in Quebec or into the White Mountains in New England if there wasn't. Nor would they travel thousands of miles to ski as I did in the Canadian Rockies. They have found the Philosopher's Stone in a snow-bank. Youth, Health and Happiness are revealed to them as three symbolical figures in ski-togs.

The only way I can prove it is to write this book.

But before I wander starry-eyed among the mountains and dilate on the vastness of them all, I had better explain how I got there, for, as is often the case, the journey itself was almost as interesting as the object of it.

The train I took at Montreal was interesting. Because I was going west to ski, it was no ordinary train to me as I went aboard: it possessed all the romance of a ship sailing for the Indies.

It was a trans-continental train, though to most of those who climbed into the coaches at the starting-point, it was just the train that took them to Ottawa. What happened to it after that didn't matter. No one could know, as I was to find, how it would awake to find itself a Personality, an entity, the following morning. The passage of a night would see it join forces with a train converging north and westward from Toronto; and then, magically, it would Find Itself. It would be Something, just as a ship is Something.

It would be my private illusion, too, that the people in it would for five days be a complex human Something that could never be again. Just like the atmosphere of a ship can never be exactly the same after a voyage is over, for the same elements can never be assembled again. The

people, the time and the place, the circumstances, can never combine again in exactly the same way.

You can't live in a conveyance, eat, sleep and have your being in it for five days and nights without thinking this, or without becoming attached to it. You can't have the same faces about you for that time, see some come and some go, without feeling that you know them. You can't slumber to the beat of the wheels on the rails, wake to see from your window the sun flooding across the white waste of the prairie, get to know the rhythm of the train when it changes engines and dining-cars and train crews and yet manages to retain its personality—all without finding yourself tremendously absorbed by it, profoundly part of it.

And so I was to come to know subconsciously every sound as the train held its steady drive westward across three thousand miles of steel, every quiet sigh as it paused at stations and the air-brakes relaxed, and Mysterious Things stirred restlessly in the mechanisms below our feet.

III

At Ottawa my mother and father appeared up the station platform and pressed strange parcels into my hands.

You may find these useful . . . don't forget to write . . . don't ski alone and don't take chances . . . keep your feet dry . . . take care of yourself.

They made it clear that they had just dropped down by luck, as it were; that they just happened to be passing the station and, by Jove, they remembered that I was going through on the train. No, of course they weren't fussing. Oh, no . . . but do remember to take care of yourself.

As the train hurried me west once more I opened the brown-paper parcel.

My father had given me a book, *Strange Street*; a bottle of malted milk tablets, said to be very sustaining and that subsequently melted into a solid mass in the breast pocket of my balloon silk wind-breaker; a bar of chocolate, a huge bar, and also said to be sustaining and nourishing; and a pair of dark glasses that proved indispensable.

My mother gave me a small bottle of cascara tablets, a tin of sal hepatica purgative salts, and two pairs of long woollen flannels.

I always like to recall that little list. It seems to show small boys are never allowed to grow up. Their parents know them too well to trust their ability to look after themselves.

As I resolutely ignored the medicines they provided my stomach did suffer from melancholia for the first day or so.

"Try a little salad, sir," suggested the steward in the dining-car. I looked particularly thin and pale, and he brooded anxiously over me. "Most people, they eat too much when they travel, sir," he warned. "Just take a little fruit this time."

But the car where I sat went hooping across the rocky road-bed north of the Great Lakes and lost itself in the monotony of the prairies, and its uneasy behaviour left my innards clutched anxiously together. I realized then that I was mentally diseased and that no one would ever love me; that anyone I did like was making violent overtures towards other young men in my absence; that I was addle-witted; and that I was probably coming out in yellow spots.

I watched the telegraph-poles slip by until I was nearly insane. The few trees that broke the snow of the plain were scrawny and naked, and the fences and houses in all their ugliness were thrown into relief. Some neglected farm machinery and an old automobile half covered with snow added a final touch, and I put my typewriter in my lap and poured out my heart.

The relief a musician might find in his piano, a writer can find in his typewriter, so I developed my morbid meanderings and wrote that . . . I have turned my eyes inward desperately seeking relaxation and peace, but it is horrid to find one's spiritual resources to be shallow. I seldom get much comfort or encouragement from mine. There is so little that is big within me. . . .

It was really very dreadful, and there was a whole page

of it—all because my stomach was a little sour. But when I got it out of my system I felt better.

Also I struggled to regain my sanity by running earnestly up and down the station platforms at each stopping-place. Other people put on their overcoats and strolled up and down in the cold. I went out as I was and ran. I had to run to keep warm, and the local yokels, gathered at each station to see the train pass through, stared amazed.

I took my exercise nervously and solemnly because I believed it would make me ski better. I was due to ski a lot when I arrived, I had skied little in the east that season, and I had to keep in some sort of condition. So I settled my *mal de train* by gallumping up and down icy platforms in sub-zero weather, and got very tired and breathless in the course of a very few minutes while the railway did various obscure things to the train. They were always exchanging engines, or breaking the train disconcertingly in two and inserting a new dining-car. It was too cold to stop and take much notice.

As I recovered the sun shone and the Rockies appeared theatrically on the horizon. I saw them at dawn and watched the light creep across the prairie, chasing the shadows from every tiny undulation, high lighting depressed horses browsing hopelessly over the snowy waste, and finally catching the mountains in a loud and almost vulgar glare.

There is something about mountains, and particularly about the Rocky Mountains, that makes me want to squeak with excitement; and on that morning I am afraid I did. It must have wakened several people in the car, but I was shameless.

I was headed for the Delectable Mountains. I was to pass through them and go on to the Pacific coast. Then I would return to ski.

Chapter Two

THE PIONEER SPIRIT

“**T**HERE are no more pioneers in this country.”
The fat man beside me in the observation car of the train shook his head sadly.

“It took pioneers to conceive and build this railroad across Canada,” he went on. “You’d think they’d be men enough to operate it decently now. They’re not. This train is two hours late already.”

Three pretty girls on the settee opposite were laughing at something, and my attention wandered. I suspected it was because I was taking five o’clock tea, which made a pleasant break in the afternoon during the long trans-continental journey. They had got on at Regina, and the spectacle of my tea-drinking seemed secretly to amuse them. I thought of offering them a bun and of getting to know them; but one bun might lead to ordering more tea for the lot, and the bare possibility turned me quickly back to the fat man.

I don’t remember what he looked like except that he was fat, his mouth turned down, and bristles of hair stood erect from the roll of flesh above his collar at the back.

“It took courage, vision, initiative, to find a way through the mountains,” he went on when he saw out of the corner of his eye that I was paying attention again. “It took skill, and knowledge, and strength, and money, a whole lot of money, to build a railroad once they had found a way.”

He spoke deliberately and emphasized each word with a gesture of his cigar. His voice was an unpleasant voice, but to me his words were merely words, and bore no relation to reality.

What was he talking about? I had to rivet my attention on the soggy end of his cigar to appear polite. The girls opposite had left. My tea was lukewarm. The hot water might have been hotter when the attendant brought it to me. It was rather annoying. Perhaps I should complain. The train was late. The water was cold. My fellow-passenger was boring.

The train dragged like some slothful serpent round the curves. Dusk was falling and the great valley into which we were finding our way, and the barren peaks that rose almost sheer from its bed, were ghostly in the half-light.

Curiously enough when we went slowly, as if to kill time, the scenery ceased to be attractive, and I became too impatient to look at it. When earlier in the day the train had entered the Rockies and had clipped briskly up the broad Bow Valley that led towards the Great Divide, I had half frozen on the open observation platform and had exclaimed at the scenery. The mountains were strongly marked by snow at that point, by the greys and browns of exposed rock, and by the black mass of trees. There was little snow actually on the floor of the valley, and there was a drizzle of rain. A wind—the Chinook—they said, was responsible.

When would we hear the familiar brisk clatter of the speeding wheels? Their rhythm had dinned into me for three days, and it seemed unnatural for the tempo to slacken.

The fat man broke into my thoughts.

"We're more than THREE hours late now." He was looking down at his watch, and he spoke with annoyance as if he had suddenly discovered something very serious. "They haven't the guts to run this railroad. There's rumour of snow-slides and some accident ahead. But they have snow-slides every year, and accidents are never bad—now the big tunnel has been built." He dismissed the idea with a wave of his now dead cigar-butt. "They just don't take the risks and make sacrifices like the pioneers."

I peered with new interest out of the window. There was a little more snow on the slopes than farther back,

but it was still raining. There were tiny slides of snow that slumped down a few feet and sprawled across the tracks. The debris showed white against the ties where a plough ahead had brushed it casually away. The train was going dead slow.

The fat man was getting on my nerves, so I got up and left, picking up a lump of sugar from the tea-tray and making my way waveringly forward through the car. It was like walking on a slack wire, for the train was swaying over serpentine track, and shiny boots projected as hazards where passengers sat slumped in their chairs looking glumly out at the ghostly patterns parading past the windows.

I reflected that it was a long but comfortable journey across Canada in winter. You covered seven hundred odd miles a day, stayed in your berth until late, took leisurely meals, ordered tea in the afternoon, talked to a few people if they looked interesting, got up and left if they weren't.

I was bunted quickly out of the club car into the draughty vestibule where the pulse of the wheels and the clanking of the couplings shouted about me. The doors had powerful springs, and I had to thrust my way back into the warmth and comfort of the next car after I had stepped gingerly across the articulating places joining the two cars.

I sat down in my regular seat in the sleeping-car and tried to read, but I was too restless. I looked out into the dusk. It had been raining that morning and a drizzle still fogged the windows.

"It's de Chinook," my coloured porter had wheezed that morning as he laboured at the final fixing of an upper berth. "But you can't reckon of what you'll find on de odder side."

"The other side of the Continental Divide?"

"No, suh, de odder side of de big tunnel. Day say der's snow-slides on de line dareabouts."

We must be nearing the big Connaught Tunnel by now, I figured, but there was little change in the weather. I got up again and started wandering forward through the train.

"Three no trumps it is," remarked a voice in a private compartment I passed. Then another: "I heard the conductor speak to a trainman about a delay. They used to have bad slides in the Selkirks, but not these days, not since the big tunnel . . . and all the snow-sheds. . . ."

I moved on, edging a moment later by the conductor himself, a stoutish man, in the narrow corridor past the compartments.

"We're late," I remarked, half as an enquiry and half as a complaint.

"Yes," said the man quietly. "We're three hours late." He walked heavily away and I asked no more. The man's eyes had looked blank. He was deeply preoccupied.

Again I stepped through the cold air-lock of the noisy vestibule between cars and entered another sleeping-car, where the porter was making up one of the berths at the end of the aisle. Then a tourist sleeper with shiny leather seats and a few berths already made up; then the diner, where the waiters were having their supper; then the crowded day coach. People in it looked tired but patient. There was little talk. Life seemed to ebb and pause as the train dragged slower through time and space.

The fat man and his views on pioneers, the voices involved in bridge, the weary passengers, all were curiously unreal. It was only when the hard, metallic sounds of the wheels on the track surrounded me as I passed from car to car that I seemed to really be moving westward through the mountains, and that I felt my feet were on earth again.

Boats and trains threaten to encompass me so completely that I cease to believe in anything but the place I leave and the place to which I am going. The world that lies between is a phantasmagoria that flits vaguely past the windows.

I had to fight to realize that the passing scenery was true and three-dimensional, that the snow was cold, that the people who gathered at the stations *en route* to watch us pass had lives of their own, and that if I stopped in any one place for two minutes it would become positive and important to me.

There was a change in the leisurely rumble of the train. The warm lights of the car brightened, the windows darkened, the drizzle ceased to feed the drops that wiggled down the glass. We had entered the big tunnel.

I sat down once more and looked about me. I had reached the Colonist car, a big, bare affair far forward in the train, clean but desolate. Half-way down a man slept with a handkerchief over his face, and at the far end a woman in a red hat, a skimpy fur hunched round her shoulders, sat looking dumbly out of the window. The place seemed infinitely sad, and I drummed my fingers nervously on the wooden arm of the seat.

This big tunnel was one of the longest on the continent. It avoided a pass where many had been killed in building and operating the railroad in the old days, I had been told. I tried to think of the men who had blasted the tunnel from the rock a few years ago, had seen their friends killed maybe, and then had tidied up their tools and machinery and gone their separate ways. I tried to think of the men who were buried in the snow-slides before the tunnel was built, and of the pioneers who had found a way in the first place, but I couldn't.

Unreasonably, I kept aware of the mute little figure in the red hat who kept staring out of the window where there was only blackness and nothing at all to see.

The train passed slowly back into the dusk from the tunnel; for a moment the great fans that blew the smoke clear roared in my ears; and then there was complete stillness and silence. We had come quietly to a stop.

I got up nervously and continued forward into the baggage car.

Beyond a confusion of trunks and bags I could see a man in overalls peeling potatoes under a light in the middle of the car. He looked up, nodded absently and went on with his work. Another man was leaning out of the big sliding door in the side of the car and was peering ahead. I joined him and looked over his shoulder.

I saw a world quite different to the one we had left at the eastern end of the tunnel. We were in a close, narrow

valley. It was darker and a fog hung low in a drear, grey ceiling. But the place was luminous, for the snow held a grey lambent light. It fell idly down through the mist; it was piled high and hung in great blobs and mushrooms upon the branches of the evergreens; it lay so deep and soft upon the ground that there was little inkling of the original form and contour.

Down a siding alongside a headlight shone dully.

"That's the rotary plough that just got through from the west," volunteered the man beside me. "She's going to be 'Y'd' around and sent back ahead of us."

An engine-bell tolled flatly through the snow-clogged air. There was a feeling of suspense in the heavy whiteness that hung from the trees and slopes about us, in the steam and smoke that piled up beneath the low fog, and in the basic silence that followed the incessant clamour of travel.

"Would you close that goddam door, Mike," said the man who was peeling potatoes. He spoke with a trace of a French-Canadian accent. "And will you come in and pump up the stove."

"In a minute, Alphonse," grunted my companion. "They've got a Fifty-nine Hundred behind the rotary, and she's coming this way."

"Oh," said the other, and he got up and joined us. This, apparently, was something to see.

The headlight approached on the siding, shining above a great circle of blades. "They get bust and shoot out like fun when they strike the odd rock in the snow when they are rotating," Mike murmured as the plough passed on the next track. Pushing it was the biggest engine I have ever seen in my life. It was black and long, and its oil-tender seemed to make it longer. I felt excited in its presence, and the two railwaymen looked after it with a trace of boyish pride in their faces.

"Been some trouble on the line?" I enquired.

There was a silence.

"Maybe hibernating bears had a bad dream and started a snow-slide," said Alphonse, returning to his potatoes.

"Bears do queer things in these parts," said Mike hurriedly, taking up the cue, and pumping vigorously at the little gasoline stove. "I mind once they took to stealing cans of milk from the platform of one of the small stations near here . . . going off with them practically slung over their shoulders."

He rattled nervously on as he jabbed at the little hand-pump, set the hissing jet alight and put water on to boil. "They're good-natured, them black bears, but you mustn't encourage them. My wife once let the children feed some when we had moved to a new point on the line, and the next day the place was lousy with bears. She got scared one afternoon when she found they was working the same berry patch . . . and she finally skiddoed when one of them started picking from the same bush."

Alphonse put his potatoes into the pot and pulled the sliding door open a little. "I wish it would stop snowing," he grumbled.

"Is the snow holding us up?" I asked.

"Yep, a lot of it slid on to the track yesterday morning, and they've just got it cleared away. . . . Tough job it was." Alphonse prodded the potatoes in the pot absent-mindedly. I sat down on one of the trunks that crowded the ends of the baggage car, leaving a little space in the middle where the baggagemen had a little desk, where two bunks let down from the wall, and where light from an unshaded bulb held back the darkness.

"I mind when the bears got good at opening canned soup," broke out Mike almost desperately. "They couldn't touch it for a while. Then they found they could crush the tins on rocks or puncture them with their teeth . . . clever critters. . . ." He went to the door and looked out again. He waved at someone and returned to his place. "But they'd rip hell out of a building if they smelt bacon stored anywhere." Then aside to Alphonse: "Jim's coming in. He's been talking with the boys on the rotary. She's headed west now."

A minute later the conductor climbed in the sliding door, brushed large flakes from his clothes, stamped and

kicked snow and slush from his boots, and mopped his brow where it had been sweating beneath his hat.

"It's thirteen now," he said to Alphonse, "and maybe more to go yet." And then to Mike: "Bill couldn't take it after all. The boys tell me he went out this afternoon." He cleared his throat. "She's in the next car, eh?" The men nodded.

With a final flick the conductor cleared the snow from the crown of his hat, tramped slowly into the darkness, slammed the door leading to the passenger cars in rear, and was gone.

There was a silence that almost breathed in as something tangible from without, in which the hiss of the stove and the tinny ticking of a clock somewhere in the car seemed to lose themselves. Then the train eased forward. Two great engines had us in tow, and we gathered speed.

Mike tried to divert the conversation once more. "Bears are friendly if they're black," he remarked, "but not if they are brown. Then they're grizzlies."

"Who's Bill?" I asked quietly.

"Oh, Bill was a track walker and he was killed or half killed yesterday," he said bitterly. "He's dead now, anyway."

"And several others with him," added Alphonse.

"How and why?" I enquired. I was slowly becoming aware of the thoughts of the others, of the misery that might lie behind Mike's chatter about bears and the non-committal remarks of Alphonse. Young men are not always alert to these things. Their own thoughts shut out all else. They are less quick to sense emotion. It is an abstract quantity in others, not easy to take seriously.

Mike came over and sat down on a valise beside me.

"Look out of the door," he said tersely. It was open a foot or so, and the light from within fell on a sheer wall of snow that was passing a few inches away. "We're passing through a small slide now. The rotary cuts through the snow like cheese. They leave just a little space on either side. The snow dumps down across the track from the mountain slopes above every little while, and the

ploughs and the section gang clear them off. They don't usually do much damage, though years ago on the pass before the tunnel was opened, thirty men were buried. Then we've got snow-sheds over the bad places . . . but we can't have 'em everywhere."

He bit off a piece of chewing-tobacco. "They could bury this train, and the passengers would be quite safe. It is steel . . . you needn't worry." I felt a little nettled. "But early yesterday morning a freight-train was stopped by a slide, and then another slide half buried the engine. It was a bad mess, and a gang set to work. They dug out the cars and the tender and a wrecking-crane dragged them away. Then men sweated between high walls of snow to clear the engine."

"No one had been hurt?"

"No, no one . . . not until the tender broke away back up-grade and ran back."

"My God!" I exclaimed.

"My God is right," said Mike bitterly. Alphonse grunted and looked hard at his potatoes. Mike went on. "It broke away, and a lad ran beside it and tried to stop it, to shove something under the wheels, to block it somehow. But it kept going, faster and faster . . . down-grade for three miles."

"Couldn't the men in the cut see it coming?"

"It was three o'clock in the morning." Mike's voice rose. "Three in the morning and pitch black. They was working by flares. They was in this narrow cut. . . . You saw how close the walls of snow come? . . . They was killed like rats in a trap. . . . I hear there were thirteen or fourteen of them there. . . . Bill was one of them."

I was silent, struggling desperately to understand, to feel. Realities when you are close upon them don't appear very dramatic.

"And then?" I prompted finally.

"Oh, and then they just cleared that away . . . and opened up the line after a bit. Now traffic can move again." He sounded sardonic but a little proud. "It was delayed, but it can move again now, mails and freight

and passengers . . . dining-cars, observation-cars . . . everything."

Bit by bit the picture came into my mind. The snow-slide . . . the cursing engine-driver whose train was stopped . . . the cursing wrecking-crew that set to dig it out in black darkness. . . . The wrecking-crane and then a slip, a broken chain perhaps, something, then the black shape rolling so slowly at first . . . so relentlessly. Then the crash, a silence . . . the cries of an injured man . . . the shouts of a few who had escaped. . . . Then the grim, silent men who went to find their friends beneath the wreckage. . . . The ever-falling snow. The threat of further slides. . . . The silence that swallowed every sound as they worked through the dawn and all the next day that the line might be cleared.

Black shadows in the snow flashed past the open slit in the doorway. We hurried to it. Another snow-wall shut us close about, but as the train moved along it dropped away and we could look back.

"Guess that was the engine they had to chuck off the line to get through," said Mike tersely.

I felt suddenly out of place, as if this was a private sorrow that shut me proudly out.

"Was Bill a friend?" I asked as I turned to go.

"Yes, he was a pal, an awfully good pal," returned Mike gently. "Jim will have to tell his wife about it. She's on board this train . . . back there in the Colonist car wearing a red hat . . . she's going to see her husband next station west of here. . . . I hope they won't let her."

I surprised the two baggagemen because I suddenly shook hands and bolted. I fled through the Colonist car and noticed that the little red hat was still turned towards the window, though it was utterly dark, and there was nothing to see.

I had become aware of real people. Men, I had discovered, had matter-of-factly given up their lives that this train could get through. Others had risked their lives. At this very moment men were patrolling and

working on the line in danger of snow-slides. The idea was somehow new and overwhelming.

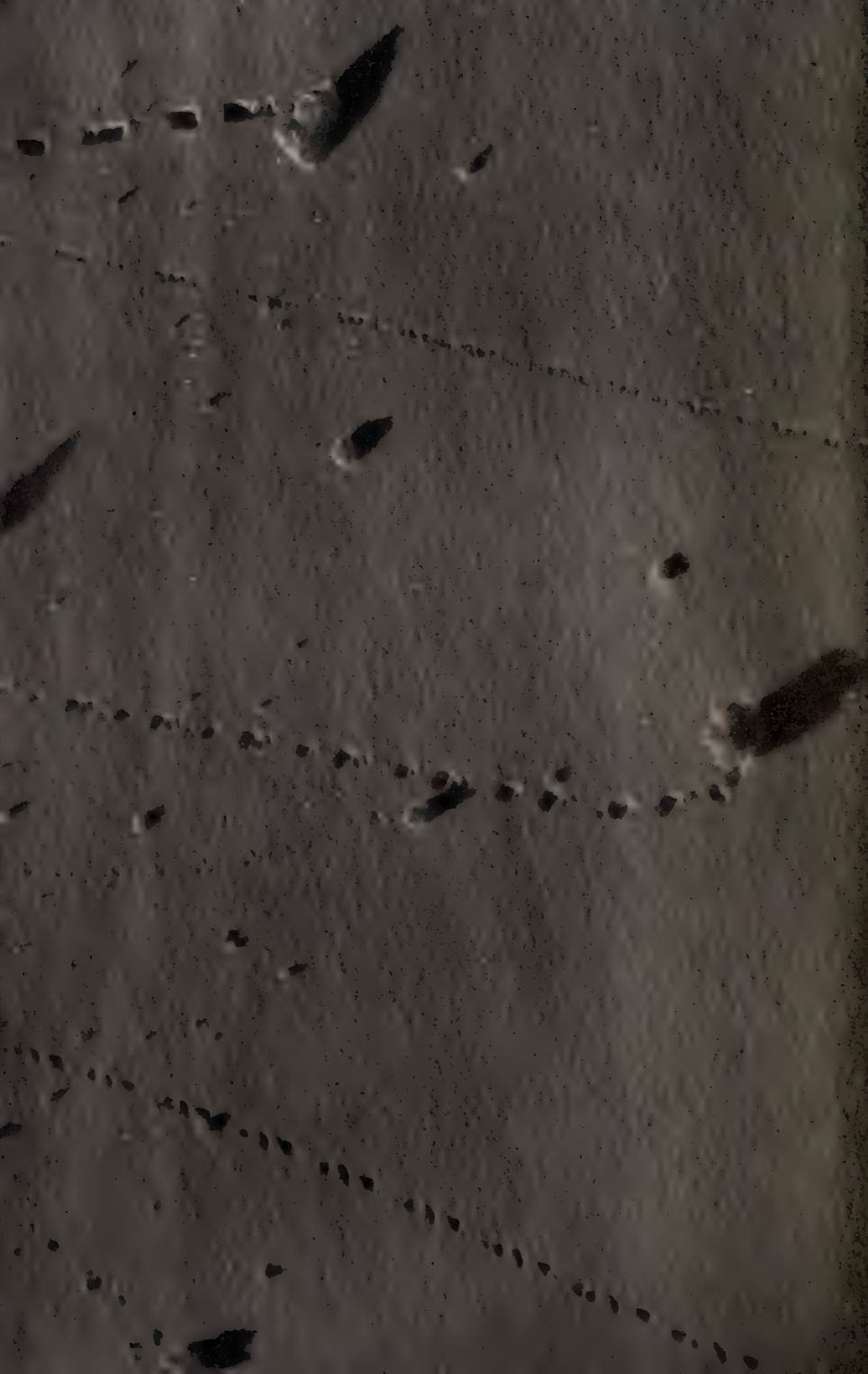
"Second call for dinner," announced a waiter passing me in the aisle, and a moment later I was lapped about by the homely warmth and scent of the dining-car. A tiny flower was stuck jauntily in a vase on the table I was politely allotted by the head steward, and a buzz of laughter and conversation filled my ears.

My mind wandered. The fat man who talked about pioneers . . . the little woman in the red hat . . . Alphonse and Mike in the baggage-car . . . Bill, their friend the track walker, who had not died at once . . . Jim, the conductor, who walked so heavily . . . all milled vaguely through my thoughts.

"We're FIVE hours late now," whined the fat man shrilly at a nearby table. "These men don't run the railroad like the old tim . . ."

And then he stopped in amazement. . . . The young man he had talked to earlier in the club car about pioneers was scowling at him as if he hated the very sight of his face.





Chapter Three

PACIFIC ENTR'ACTE

I

MY train, plain number three or seven or something on the time-table, and not the Empress of India or anything romantic like that, took me across three thousand miles of Canada and into the fringe of two or almost three seasons. In the east it was cold, damn cold. When we changed engines at Sudbury or thereabouts the smoke piled up into a grey sky, sounds were clear and brittle, and the thermometer registered twenty below zero Fahrenheit. The prairies were patchy, mostly under snow, but there were parts where the lack of it made the landscape momentarily unkempt.

Then came the foothills and the Bow Valley touched by the warm Chinook wind. It was raining there, and the snow had retired higher up the mountain-sides. Then the Great Divide, or the boundary water-shed between Alberta and British Columbia, and down-grade into the valley of the Columbia—all in continued mild weather.

Next were the Selkirks and the drastic change after the Connaught Tunnel: the heavy snow, the completely different landscapes. Finally, after a night, the train had left the snow behind, had passed the Dry Belt or relatively barren hills in the interior of the province and had entered the Wet Belt, where moss grew on the isolated crags that reached up from rugged canyons far below the train and conifers clothed the slopes.

Descending towards the Pacific there was a different feel to the air. It was damp, mild, springlike; the snow was gone. When I took one of the Princess boats the

morning of my arrival, from Vancouver to Victoria, the sun was shining, gulls followed the ship, and it was summer.

This was all very unsettling. I was out to ski and yet I was falling under the spell of the Pacific coast climate. It was a good thing I had to return into the mountains in two days' time, else I would have taken root.

As it was the weather gave me an intense fit of patriotism. As I basked on the sun-deck of the smart little coastal steamer cruising out towards the provincial capital on the south tip of Vancouver Island, I thought of the great cities I had seen. There had been Montreal, the port to the Atlantic; Ottawa, the beautiful capital of my country; Winnipeg and Regina and Calgary on the prairies, and now Vancouver, the spacious port on the Pacific.

I didn't think then of the things of which my country should be ashamed: its racial animosities, religious narrowness, social snobberies, sectional stupidities, financial and political corruption and national spinelessness. I didn't brood over all the small and selfish things we have done in the past, nor of the hopelessly inadequate things we would so ineptly continue to do in the future.

I could only remember that the cities had seemed fine cities, and that some of them had come into being in a very few years; I could only remember how gentle were the Laurentians with the farms of the habitants nestling among them, how beautiful was the landscape of Ontario under the snow; and how the Rockies in their winter raiment never looked lovelier.

As from the boat I watched the landscape of the mainland change in outline and vistas up the inlets open and close as we passed, and as the ship threaded its way through the beautiful islands of the strait, I reflected that I had been granted a rare vision of my country. I had seen it *en passant* at what was to many an unattractive season, at what was undoubtedly its least attractive season, and yet I had found it exciting, and had found myself terribly proud to be Canadian.

I reflected that my country was so great and so beautiful

that, however small we were, it would make us worthy of it, and that we would prosper and find peace and happiness in it—despite ourselves.

II

Before I could develop a tear in my eye or a lump in my throat from the pangs of patriotism, I landed at Victoria; and Victoria had a calming effect. Peace reigned over the place. The streets were deserted. A small dog came out and barked at me as I passed. Then he realized what he had done and hurried back behind a hedge, much ashamed.

I was a sightseer. I saw vegetation I had never seen in any other part of Canada. "What's that?" I asked one man silently puttering in his garden. "That's yew," he said; and the reply left me nonplussed, for at first it sounded like a wisecrack. And in addition to yew, I saw holly, broom and gorse.

The whole set-up was Anglo-Saxon. I was not to see anything like it until I tramped the streets of Golders Green.

I took the night boat regretfully back to Vancouver.

III

So much for my visions and for Victoria: in Vancouver I began to ski. I didn't climb Grouse Mountain or Hollyburn or make an expedition by car to Mount Baker over the American border; time did not permit. But I began to *talk* ski-ing, and that is the best thing I do.

My season really falls about midsummer, and I ski best when I'm clutching a cocktail, a cup of afternoon tea or a tennis-racket.

Someone remarks that it must be fun to ski, and I tell them that yes it is. There is no use putting on my act for the uninitiated.

But someone remarks that they can never get a stem to the left, and I prick up my ears. The cocktail or the tea or the racket trembles slightly in my hand, and I turn upon them expectantly. This is my cue; this indicates a

skier who is still a rabbit, someone who has been exposed to the snow but has not yet learned what to do about it: here is my ideal victim.

"Oh," I say nonchalantly. "It's easy. You just force all your weight over that outside ski."

They look sad, as if dwelling fleetingly upon some painful memory. Then, as I wait breathless, they ask: "How do you mean?"

I am overjoyed. I have been dying to tell them, to tell anybody, all about it. The tea or the cocktail spills, my racket is set aside; I leap into action.

"You just bend your knees, like this." I am crouching in the middle of the room like a gigantic frog. "You put all your weight over one leg, like this." And I writhe about, lose my balance and probably topple into a what-not.

The party is now paralysed but impressed. While the hostess watches in agony for her furniture, the others follow me, stemming, turning down alpine slopes, leaping over obstacles, dashing daringly straight down the steepest parts, and swinging gracefully through beautiful powder snow when they just want to show how good they are.

I pantomime, glorying in the limelight: How you ski on the level and how you swing your poles in either hand, though if I'm in England I call them "sticks" as otherwise they visualize a pair of telegraph-poles.

I demonstrate the stem, and the carpet is scuffed into a dejected mess. That, I tell them, helps to slow you down snow-plough style and to prepare for a turn. Then I go on with the turn, and if I'm a little lit I'll demonstrate a jump turn. It's all very disrupting; but it's marvellous as a parlour trick.

The only mistake I can make is letting some of the people I impressed in July see me ski in January.

When I began my particular brand of ski-ing in Vancouver, I was at a disadvantage. I was entertained by a charming crowd of contemporaries who were all probably better skiers than I was; I came as an official representing skiers in the east; and I was uncomfortably aware that the

ski-ing I would find in the west was far stiffer than anything I had hitherto experienced. It was restoring to be introduced as: "The co-editor of the *Canadian Ski Year Book* and Chairman of the Committee on Education and Promotion of the Canadian Amateur Ski Association." It took a deep breath to get it all out. But I was rather scared.

So in Vancouver itself I decided the weather was against my going up to ski on Grouse Mountain, and I frantically strove to keep the conversation on sailing. I nearly fell in love with two of the prettiest girls in the city; I was given a bottle of whisky; and I photographed one of my hosts under the Big Tree in Stanley Park.

It was not until I was cornered in a Colonist car headed back towards the Rockies that I really began my Conversational Ski-ing; and then I tried to turn the tables and make my new friends do it all for me.

I sat with a typewriter in my lap pecking out a note to my associate, the Gadget Editor of the Year Book, feeding him with morsels of curiosa about equipment peculiar to ski-ing at Vancouver. I learned that they ski on a peculiar brand of "corn" snow, which permits of a light, pliant ski being used; that it often rains; and that they usually carry waterproofs and often coloured umbrellas. They were experimenting with bakelite running surfaces and edges, and often improvised bits of inner tubing as Amstutz Springs, and used webbing, canvas and gunny sacking as "skins" for climbing. But all this is technical. However, it indicates that ski-ing, *chez moi*, is a sport for everybody, that it is enjoyed for itself under all sorts of conditions, and that where people can't afford to buy good equipment and gadgets, they will use their own makeshifts.

It was a pleasant trip and a lively crowd. We travelled in a serviceable Colonist car with leather-covered seats that could be pulled out to make passable bunks, and shelves that let down on chains from the roof and provided further sleeping space. It was the cheapest way to travel, but we were comfortable enough. Those who had brought blankets or sleeping-bags used them. A few spent the

night in the Standard or Tourist sleeping-cars in rear; but most bivouacked where they were.

There were Canadians and there were Canadianized Swedes and Norwegians. There was a doctor and his wife and a lawyer and an ex-baggage-man who was the oldest and pluckiest skier of the lot. It was a properly democratic crowd and a happy one. Some played bridge, some read magazines, some talked ski-shop, some scraped and waxed their skis in the aisle or fiddled with the bindings. Towards evening someone played a mouth-organ and songs would break out in various parts of the car. They were not German ski songs but things like the "Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze," and they did very well. The car bristled with skis and poles, was festooned with rucksacks and limp wind-breakers, littered with big ski-boots. It was an agreeable picture.

IV

Meanwhile the train, which was an east-bound trans-continental but which had no transcontinental charm because I would cease to be interested in it after Banff, disappeared into the night, and emerged into the dawn the next morning half-way across the province of British Columbia. We continued on up into the heavy snows of the Selkirks once more, through the Connaught Tunnel, back over the Great Divide in the Rockies, and finally down the Bow Valley at a good clip towards Banff.

Banff and the Rockies thereabouts represented a positive memory to me. I had lived among them for three summer months six years before and I fell so in love with them that I have been pretty well immune to the wiles of women ever since. Nothing human could be as interesting, as exciting, as attractive. It was rather unfair to set up whole ranges of snow-capped mountains in opposition to Feminine Sex Appeal; but I did, and it meant that I could always retire to my Ivory Tower set high on a Rocky Mountain whenever I was Thwarted, which was often.

It proved, when I arrived in Banff that evening with my ski-friends, that Memory and Reality bore little

resemblance. Literally, they were as opposed as Summer and Winter. Snow and ski-ing made all the difference; and I soon ceased to attempt to make what I saw jib with what I remembered. The new spectacle was far too much fun.

Banff had become ski-minded. The lads I remembered telling tall tales about horses were just as amusing about ski-ing; and the Western and Rocky Mountain Ski Championships to be held the following day were the one topic of conversation.

The ski meet turned out to be an entertaining affair well run, about the best ski meet I had attended in Canada in fact, and a good prelude to the national championships that were held there the following year. Banff is western, hospitable, and has a faculty of sizing up strangers as being phoney or genuine in about two minutes. Moreover, it does things with gusto; and the speed the citizens put into the handling of their ski meet indicated that it was a good thing for the sport that they had become enthused.

Ski-ing had struck Banff later than might be expected, though the country round there was ideal for the purpose. The sport had been considered in Canada more as a means of locomotion in winter, like snow-shoeing, than as a speciality. The Scandinavians brought it over, introduced long-distance cross-country racing, and instituted jumping. All this was interesting, but it didn't make ski-ing widely popular. It was exciting to watch "Those crazy Swedes" fling themselves from big jumping hills; but you got cold after a time, even bored, and certainly it didn't make you want to ski yourself.

Then the technique of ski-ing downhill began to be heard about. It had been developed and encouraged and talked about by the English in the Alps, and it proved that there were different turns and methods of control that would prevent you from falling too often when you were ski-ing down-grade. And once that had been discovered, it was quite obvious that sliding downhill was great fun, particularly when you were able, with *élan*, to run under control.

Ski-ing of this sort became The Thing: it was another

specialized refinement, but it attracted beginners, and it gave the whole business a great fillip.

It also introduced Heresies; it split the sport with argument; and well-intentioned and otherwise normal people completely lost their sense of humour and proportion in attacking or defending one phase of the sport or another. They sulked, they wrote books about it, they resigned from clubs or were ejected: human nature had been given another way to make a fool of itself.

But any publicity is usually good publicity; and downhill ski-ing sounded attractive. People learned control and to negotiate a Slalom course, which is a series of pairs of flags set zigzag style down a slope; and the new knowledge made them far better equipped to manage the bush trails common in the more thickly populated regions of Canada and the United States.

However, the best terrain for this was naturally the snow-fields above the tree-line in the Canadian Rockies, which explains how Banff came into the picture, and why those mountains to-day suggest everything that is spectacular and exciting to the enterprising skier.

V

On the heights above Banff I began to fight the protracted Waterloo that was the Canadian Rockies. I had been ski-ing for three years with fair aplomb. Before that there had been a space when I did not ski at all, and an earlier stage when I had skied and slid straight downhill as a little boy. During the last three years I had learned the technique, I had ceased to fear, I had developed my tendency to give ski lessons in drawing-rooms in mid-summer, and I had ceased to sympathize with the beginner. I had momentarily been raised to another plane: I was a superior being Who Knew How, and who carefully avoided getting caught where he didn't know how, and who must have been insufferable. I know that I nearly killed one friend by taking him on a twenty-mile cross-country hike, and that I ruined a Beautiful Friendship by trying to teach The Girl to ski.

The comforting and yet the dangerous thing was that I was no longer alarmed by any ski-ing I saw in the east, and only barely tolerant of beginners who suffered in purgatory at the top of baby slopes. I was ripe for a Come Down—and it came.

At the Nursery Slope on Mount Norquay above Banff, and on the terrain where the championships were being held, I donned my skis for the first time in the west. They were new, for I had abandoned my old pair in the east, and unfamiliar. They had an abominably high arch and weighed a ton. At the new altitude, in fact, I and everything I wore seemed to weigh more than usual, and after rushing exuberantly towards the foot of the slope, I stopped and panted. I rushed at the hill again, and gasped. I struggled and laboured upwards, sliding on a hard icy surface, and hearing my heart pounding in my ears.

Then I looked back and saw how high I had come. I nearly had a fit. I had never been so high before. Skiers by the club hut in the valley looked like pygmies; Banff, far below in another direction, was below the snow-line and looked like a toy village; my knees were knocking with fatigue and fear. When I came down I slipped, tripped, and fell with a prodigious clatter, many times.

I was bruised, battered, beaten-up. I thanked my stars I had not been involved in any of the races I saw being run from far above the tree-line. I was humbled to the point of being defeated. Justice had been done poetically. Never again would I be so cavalier in my treatment of tyros. Fear had been introduced into my vitals, and so long as I skied in the High Country, it stayed there, and I came rather to enjoy its presence. It always made me feel Terribly Brave when I did anything.

That first day I didn't stop to think that I should have become acclimatized, that I should have climbed slowly; that I needed steel edges for such hard snow on such a steep slope, and that I needed to be a stronger and better skier to be equal to the new conditions. All this knowledge was to come with experience.

The ski-ing at Mount Norquay is largely at or below the

tree-line, and not above it; but it is connected with Banff by a motor road, is served by a pleasant little club hut where refreshments are available, and provides excellent practice ground for anyone planning to ski at one of the popular "camps" or outposts in the High Country. Also it is an ideal site for championships. The spectators can see everything with binoculars from one vantage point; and there are facilities for every variety of competition. All this for the skier who may crave a little real information.

Chapter Four

BY SKI TO SKOKI

CHASTENED, but also toughened, by my romping on the nursery slopes of Norquay above Banff, I was ready to begin my tour of accessible Rocky Mountain ski terrain. Accordingly next day I took the mid-morning train from Banff to Lake Louise, forty odd miles back westward on the main line of the railway in the Bow valley.

I had little time at my disposal before I had to return east, and I had a gruelling programme of ski-ing ahead of me. As it proved I did too much in too short a time. I made the fairly strenuous trips in and out to all the ski camps, but I stayed at each place scarcely long enough to get the lay of the land, and as a result got more *lang-lauf* and touring—ski-ing with a heavy pack—than high alpine ski-ing which is the best of the lot. What I accomplished was enough for a whole winter, but with a month spent at each ski centre.

As I peered out of the window of the train as it ascended the Bow Valley towards Lake Louise station I reflected that if people knew how beautiful under snow were the Rockies I saw before me, and the Selkirks I had traversed to the west, then thousands would choose the northern route across the Continent in winter, and thousands would take their annual holiday among them on skis. They could never rival the Alps because heavily populated areas are too distant, but their charms are as great if not greater.

As I scrambled excitedly from one side of the train to the other, saw the familiar groupings of mountains about Banff give way to a titanic panorama that unrolled itself for an hour or more, I thought how blind people must be

not to see and to feel the beauty I did in our Canadian winter.

The snow, the sunshine, the cold, dry, stimulating air, the forests that became so tidy against the white background, all these I found so exciting that I wanted to throw things about for joy and wished I were enough of a giant to rush among the trees I admired and root up a few for sheer exuberance. Of course this was because I was young, and because when I skied I was given *entré* to this paradise; because on skis I could feel the fresh snowflakes brushing against my face and luxuriate in the smoothness and softness beneath my feet.

But not only did I love winter: I loved mountains. They, too, made me want to throw things about. I simply had to look at them and I could imagine myself striding up the slopes in Seven League Boots. I wanted to stand on their summits and Shout; I wanted to lie on my back in the valleys, rest my feet in the saddle of a pass, and look at the sun. Mountains definitely unsettled me. They didn't make me feel small but great.

Combine, however, the most sublime form of winter with the most stupendous variety of mountain scenery; give me the prospect of exploring their finest reaches on skis; and, obviously, I verge on lunacy.

Certainly Bob Hansen, my travelling companion, must have thought I was nuts as I rushed about the half-empty coach. I stared out of windows, exclaimed, gasped, and probably gibbered audibly.

He was a gentle and unobtrusive soul, this acquaintance I had met in Banff, and it was my good fortune that he was bound for Skoki ski camp, where I wanted to get that night. He said little as we travelled, and when we disembarked at Lake Louise station he set about quietly preparing the climbing skins for his skis, and the heavy pack he was to carry up to the camp. I was still in the throes of a Sense of Power and blithely offered to carry some of his load. It was a heavy affair, fifty-two pounds on the station scales in fact; and mine must have been fifteen or twenty pounds less. It seemed very unfair, for

he was a small man. But fortunately he refused all help. Indeed he wanted to carry some of my small pack. He said it was his business and that he was used to it and had to carry supplies each day up to the camp. Undoubtedly he could have done it, for though he was a head shorter than I, he weighed twenty pounds more; and held a steady, unhurried, and relentless pace during the five odd hours of ski-ing that followed, and seemed to have the strength of a small pony.

We lunched in the tiny hotel beside the station and started out in the early afternoon. As I enthusiastically broke trail and kept going ahead and looking back over my shoulder like an impatient retriever, I was able to get my bearings. The half-obliterated tracks I followed in the snow crossed one of the smaller tributaries of the Bow River, cut across the flats of the valley, and began a long climb up the north slope. I could look south and down after a time across the valley towards the cleft where the beautiful lake was hidden and where the Lake Louise group dominated the rugged horizon. There was a break to the left of it for Paradise Valley and another for the Valley of the Ten Peaks.

The clefts closed in and the familiar outlines of the mountains changed and merged into a jumble as we gained altitude, and after a couple of hours I was swallowed in the forests of the mouth of Ptarmigan Valley that debouched high in the wall of the Bow Valley, and the sound of a distant railway whistle echoed up to me in a farewell salute.

They are deep and haunting, the whistles of our Canadian locomotives, and the two long and two short blasts they leave to linger like ghosts in the wilderness as they approach an occasional level-crossing have a curious appeal to my memory. When I am away from home I often think how good it would be to hear the call of a loon across the waters of a northern lake, the clear brave call of the oh-sweet-sweet-sweet-canada-canada-canada bird in the heat of noon, or the whistle of a train through the dusk. But this confuses the picture, and may sound silly. We are

plugging up the Ptarmigan Valley now: we must stick to it.

The trail was one of the best I encountered in the Rockies. The space between the trees where there would be downhill running in the return journey was broad, and the gradient was interesting without being too interesting. It proved to have been cut as a ski trail and was not a pony trail, and as such reflected credit upon the National Parks authorities. Canada is fortunate in having certain large areas in the Rockies and elsewhere preserved as national or, occasionally, provincial parks. Hunting and fishing are restricted or prohibited, building is strictly controlled, and the landscape and wild-life are left as unspoilt as possible.

The trail worked its way up through the forest of fir by easy stages. The snow lay heavy on the trees, for the old tracks were completely hidden higher up by a heavy fall the night before, and no wind had come to disturb it. The silence was only broken by an odd dry cough from friend Bob. For a while it sounded from behind and eventually from in front. On skins he climbed far more directly and easily than I did without them, and anyway my strength and eagerness waned and I was glad to tail along behind. It was the hare and the tortoise, only the tortoise carried all the load, and the hare was panting heavily. Three thousand feet of climbing take energy, you know, particularly when you're out of condition.

But why I never used skins then or thereafter in the Rockies I can't explain. Few skiers did there that year, perhaps because they had only the troublesome kind you stick on and adhere to special ski wax, and not the skins or plush gadgets that could be strapped quickly in place that I used the following year in Switzerland. Anyway, they didn't, except for Bob and one or two others. Maybe it was against our inherited Scandinavian tradition.

"Skins," in case you don't know, are strips of sealskin or plush for the bottom of the skis, on which the grain of the hair is to the rear. Thus they slide readily forward, but resist any backward slipping, and let you climb up a

slope as steeply as you wish. You only need them for alpine ski-ing.

The sense of loneliness increased as Ptarmigan Valley led us farther away from the railway and deeper into the Rockies, and revealed vistas towards the tree-line and the pass ahead of us. There was no one within miles. Our goal was another three hours' ski-ing, probably, ahead.

Then suddenly there was another figure on the trail. There were salutations between Bob and the new-comer, and it appeared he was another member of the staff of the camp sent ahead to meet me, in case I had missed connection for the former and had been coming up alone, as I had thought of doing. It was just as well I didn't as the trail after the snow-fall was not easy to find, and ski-ing alone in untravelled country is bad practice.

The new-comer, who was an Easterner like myself, and with a clan name distinguished in Canadian history—that of Mackenzie—had a cough to equal his friends. I asked them about it, and they said it was frosted lung—from packing supplies over the trail when the thermometer had stood at fifty below zero two months before. It had been a cold snap that had pretty well paralysed the Banff Winter Carnival, though more often it was the victim of a Chinook thaw.

On an eminence near the head of the valley appeared the Half-way Cabin. It had a fine view, a million-dollar view, down towards Temple and Louise, but I was interested only in the Rest I might find within.

We stopped there, chatted as we sat on the edge of the broad communal bunk padded with hay, made tea, and indulged in a teaspoonful of rum in our tea. I learned about who was at the ski camp, and what the weather had been like, and how one should always leave kindling and dry wood by the stove in the hut because you never could tell but the next man who came might need it badly . . . and all the little things of the western ski world became interesting and important, and all the big things of the outer world slipped away. I lay back in the hay and looked at the peeled logs that formed the rafters.

"What are you fellows up to now?" I asked, after a space of blissful emptiness. The two men were pottering about with my skis.

"Just fixing it so you can climb better with Mac's skins," said Bob, returning to waxing the running surfaces of my skis.

Mac grinned. "Don't forget you're the dude in this outfit," he said.

I was horrified. A dude was a city slicker, a tenderfoot, a guy who rode a horse and was lead through the mountains or told he was roughing it on a ranch. I protested.

"Well," said Bob, "we figure that anyone who is not working on a party, anyone who's there for fun, is a dude. And I guess it applies to ski-ing as well as to trail riding."

I brooded. It broke my already half-shattered Illusion of Power. It established a division between the Workers and the Players. I wanted to feel I was pulling my weight, and they wouldn't let me. They saw I was tired from the long climb, and they calmly took me in hand. They gave me a pair of skins, carried my pack when the time came to start again. There was no nonsense or argument about it. They just did it.

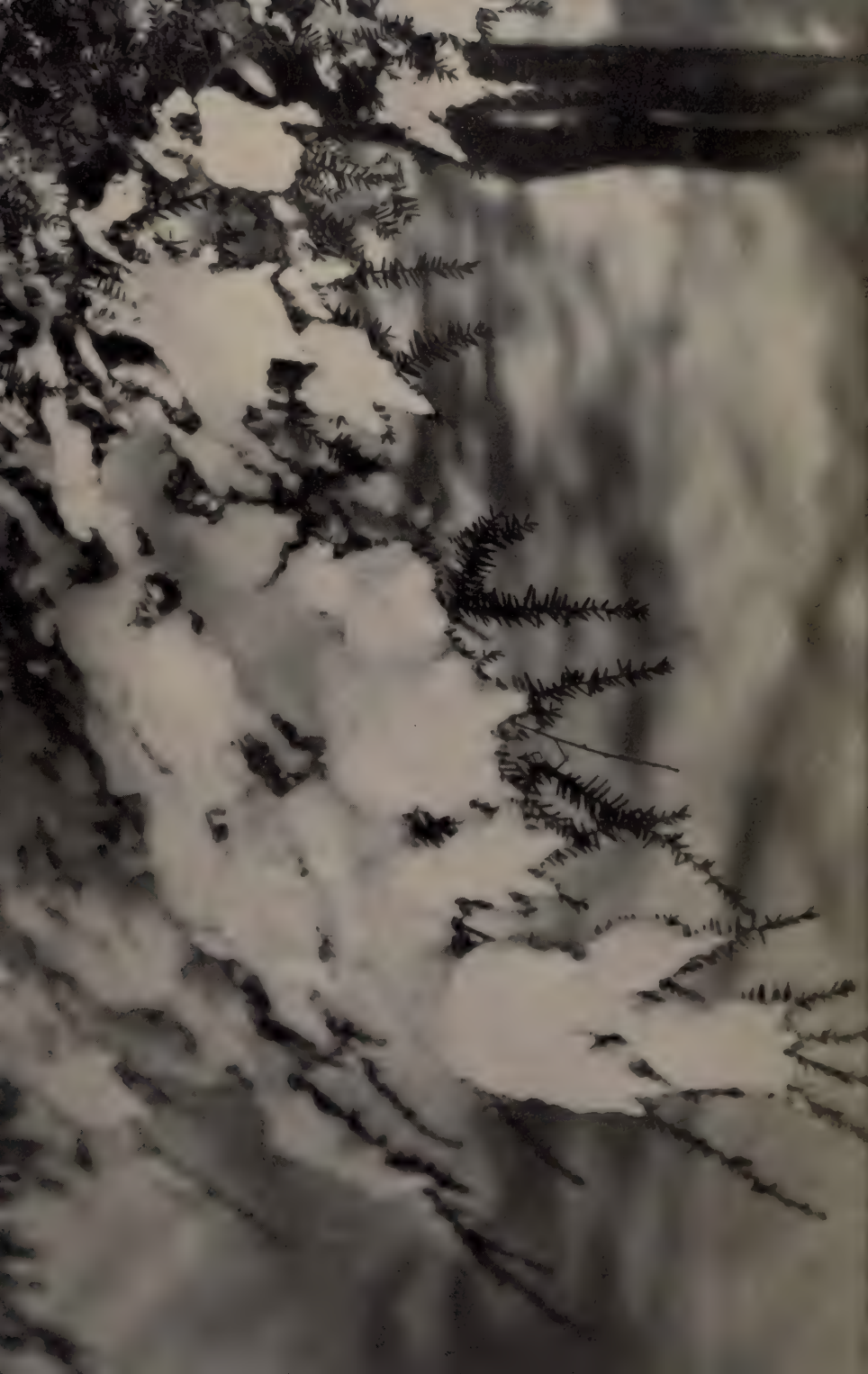
As we started to tidy up before leaving, I asked them about the cold snap when their lungs had been frosted. Was it often as cold as that?

"We've never," said Bob, as he went methodically ahead with putting the sugar and butter back on a shelf, rinsing out the cups, and brushing off the oil-cloth on the table, "we never had it as cold as they did one winter twelve years ago north of Edmonton."

He paused to let me wonder how cold it had been then. "It ran to seventy or eighty below," he went on. "But you never felt it because it was so dry. The Husky dogs didn't seem to suffer, though they lived in a corral in the open, and buried themselves in the snow at night in the usual way."

He was polishing the oil-cloth now. "A funny thing about the effect of the cold on the dogs, though. You couldn't hear 'em bark.





"It was so cold the sounds just froze in mid-air and fell at their feet. The ground was thick by the end of the winter with barks and snarls and growls, all of which had frozen solid before they could reach your ears."

He pulled on his mitts.

"Of course in the spring, when the thaw came . . . the noise was terrific . . ."

And he opened the door and disappeared into the dusk. It was a good exit.

The last stage of the journey was up over Boulder Pass and across a high alpine lake, where an aeroplane from Calgary made the first landing a couple of weeks later, up over Deception Pass, and finally down among the trees once more into Skoki Valley.

At the top of Deception Pass, about eight thousand feet above sea-level, Bob produced a head-lamp, fed from a battery in his pocket, that clipped to his head-band like a miner's lantern. The beam it threw was powerful, and though it blinded me to everything beyond its range, it made downhill ski-ing much easier.

It was an eerie business. Mackenzie had struck another line over the pass and had disappeared ahead. A heavy grey sky pressed down upon the blackness that flooded up from the valley before us, and the snow lost itself in shapeless reaches of lighter shadow. As we paused, stripped the skins from our skis, and tied them round our waists, and as Bob fixed the head-lamp in place, the wind breathed past us, and uncertainty and desolation seemed to lap us about. We were well above the tree-line, the last stage across the alpine lake with little flags projecting rakishly at intervals as markers, had seemed like an Arctic waste; and now, to me at least, the Unknown was ahead.

It was a relief, however, to be moving down-grade, and I followed Bob as closely as I could, keeping my eyes fixed on the wavering pool of light that fled across the snows and was the one sure and tangible element in this world of snow and wind and darkness.

For the first time in winter I was in that strange other world above the tree-line, and it was dark. I skied more

by instinct than anything else. There were times when I kept my skis thrust out in a tense snow-plough wedge to hold me back as I kept behind my leader. Other times I ran straight and seemed to be floating in darkness with only the faint hiss of the snow past my ski-points to indicate that I was moving. Or again, I was dashing down some terrific slope, and my stomach tied itself into terror-stricken knots.

But it was hard to tell. Once, when I was dashing down the steepest slope of my life faster than I had ever skied before, I tried frantically to turn, and I fell. Then it proved I had been barely moving. There had been nothing to go by, I had lost my sense of balance and movement, it was all an illusion.

Reassured and ashamed I got up and continued. Trees broke the surface of the snow after a time, first a few scrubby bushes, then gnarled conifers, and finally long glades of spruce and pine dropping gently to the valley floor. There was a mile or so through a series of natural clearings, and then a light.

After twelve or thirteen miles of ski-ing, after climbing a few thousand feet, after fatigue and a little hunger, and fear in small doses, I had reached Skoki.

Chapter Five

VICARIOUS ADVENTURE

I

WHEN I travel I am greedy. I pitch not only into food, but into people, settings and situations. I am sensually hungry; I feed eagerly upon everything that comes; I see and absorb and remember; and after a few days I am glutted to the point of listlessness—and I realize that I have probably been very naïve and childish in my enthusiasm.

But in time the confusion is adjusted. My memories become orderly and from among them certain people and places, certain moments of fear and ecstasy are outstanding. They are inward realities to which I can turn when outward realities are too much for me. They justify the whole nerve-racking business.

Skoki ski camp supplies a background for several memories. It is a collection of log-cabins in a wooded valley, walled about by mountain giants, and at the junction of other tributary valleys giving access deeper into a titanic alpine fastness.

It is the one human outpost north of the transcontinental line of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Rockies until you reach the line of the Canadian National at Jasper. And then the mountains continue north of that for a thousand miles on into the Arctic Circle. To the east are several ranges before the foot-hills and the prairies; to the west is the Continental Divide, the Selkirks, and a jumble of ranges terminating in the coastal bulwark indented by the deep fjords of the Pacific. South of the railway are two more ski camps, and then again untracked snows until the mountains lose height in their reaches beyond the American border.

Fifty Switzerlands in one, this land is called, and in winter, and in terms of ski-ing, this is particularly so. In place of the crowded resorts of Switzerland and Austria, however, with their hotels and funiculars, there are here only a few organized ski centres, two main lines of railway, a few scattered park rangers living the life of hermits in winter; and then great areas of unexplored snow-fields.

At Skoki I met some of the men who live in this limitless landscape, and I found they were beginning to live in it on skis with the same ease and enjoyment that they did on horses in summer. Since white men first penetrated the Rockies they have saddled their mountain ponies and pack-horses and disappeared for weeks and months at a time. It has been to hunt, to fish, to trap, to prospect, to aid in surveys, to take "dudes" on tours, or it has just been for the fun of the thing. And the terrain that is theirs is usually not "discovered" until they guide someone else there.

The youngsters, I gathered, had begun to wander on skis, to guide "pioneers" and to use their skis in the same free way they used their ponies. They back-packed their grub and "flea bags"; they slept out under Arctic conditions in "brush camps"; they crossed passes that had never been traversed before in winter, and in some cases they penetrated into country never before visited.

The ski camp where I met some of them was typical of others I should see and characterized by an atmosphere found nowhere else in the world. It lacked the comforts, the plumbing, the service of Switzerland; but it had a charm of its own. It was in many ways a Dude Ranch with the ski complex. In the main cabin the log walls displayed the skin of a grizzly bear (Come now, Meredith: Was there a skin of a grizzly bear on the wall? . . . Well, I *think* there was; and if there wasn't, it would be nice if there had been), an old lariat, a climbing rope and an ice-axe, a First Aid cabinet, some broken ski points, a western saddle, a skull of a horse, ski posters and maps, a pair of antlers, and some huge rowled western spurs.

The stove was of the air-tight type, a large drum set

horizontally, and above it was festooned an amazing collection of ski gear: mittens, socks, boots, skins, headbands, moccasins, wind-breakers, and a shameless set of milady's long woolly underwear.

Reached by a series of radiating paths tramped deep in the snow were smaller bunk-houses and, luxury of luxuries, a bath house with a water heater, tank and shower. The whole place was sheltered among the trees and hard to find, for it was half-buried beneath the snow.

This picture was animated by several interesting people. There was Jim Boyce, who was a fascinated spectator of my ski-ing during the first two or three pages of this book. He had worn skis for the first time in his life a couple of seasons back, but now he managed very well. There was a chubby little American from Minneapolis who kept up a delightful line of banter, and his wife who was about the nicest thing I've met in a long time; there was a pretty girl from Calgary, and a thin, red-haired, pleasant young man from the same city named Art.

We sprawled along the long dining-table at one side of the room and gossipped—about the ski-races at Banff, about the weather, and about what we might do the next day; and Dan, the cook, clambered over us and set the table in complete calm and good humour. At last he'd announce: "Grub's ready, folks, come and get it." And then we'd banquet, western style.

On the evening of the second day others arrived. There was Victor Kutchera, an Austrian ski and climbing guide who trained many of the Banff boys to ski; a pleasant couple from Vancouver, and two pretty girls who had been on the ski-car east-bound; and Rupert Edwards, "one of the boys from Banff."

He was an unobtrusive young man, this "Rupe" Edwards, and he said little. It was a pity, for he had a story to tell. I think it illustrates my ideas on ski-pioneering. He had been on skis to the Columbia ice-fields.

Straddling the Continental Divide in the Rockies, this is the largest mass of ice in the world south of the Arctic circle, and from it flow waters that find their way into the

Pacific, the Arctic, the Atlantic, Hudson's Bay, and, I think, the Gulf of Mexico. I've glimpsed it myself from the Castleguard meadows when I was lucky enough to join with the Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery in making the first ascent of Mount Amery in that neighbourhood.

To reach it in summer is child's play. Pack-horses carry all the equipment and food. But "Rube" had been there in winter.

He was one of three, Clifford White and A. L. Weaver of Banff were the others, who skied from Lake Louise station to the ice-fields and back in March, 1933. The trip was not epic, not the first of its kind; the three-hundred-mile trek on skis between Jasper and Louise had been made a couple of times already by westerners; the ice-fields had been visited twice in winter. The point to me is that they did it for fun, and without the backing of any outside "pioneer."

The account of it I've picked up in a back number of the *Canadian Ski Year Book*, written by Weaver. There are bits that should interest you. I'll quote them.

As only a small quantity of food was cached en route, each skier had to back-pack about fifty pounds to start with. This included a light tent and ground-sheet, a glacier rope and axe, sleeping-bags, a spirit-stove and fuel, and ninety pounds of food between them. They started north from Lake Louise by way of Skoki because part of the route by that much longer detour had never been traversed on skis.

"Cutting across to the Pipestone River, we jumped a large bull moose. Packs were dropped and Edwards and I (Weaver) pushed in to corner it, while White set his camera. The advantage was all with the skiers for the moose had heavy going in the belly-deep snow. Within five minutes the animal was cornered—and on the fight. Backed under the protection of a big tree he defied the three humans who ran on top of the snow and snorted his contempt of them. In his efforts to get within good camera range White nearly came to grief when the moose charged, and being without ski-poles could barely out-

distance the infuriated beast. However, the moose wouldn't leave his fort very far and, after putting White to flight, returned to get his wind. Several exposures were taken and the party proceeded, leaving the moose with the feeling that he had won the day."

They made the first crossing of dangerous Molar Pass from the Pipestone back into the upper Bow Valley, spent the nights in empty park rangers' cabins where possible, and in six days they had plodded over Bow summit, descended to the Saskatchewan at its junction with the Alexandra, and followed the North Fork round the flank of Mount Saskatchewan. The distance was over ninety miles from their starting-point. The snow amongst the trees was heavy, but in the open it was better. The temperatures ranged from thirty-two below zero Fahrenheit to a few degrees above. At last they reached the final ridge on the threshold of the ice-fields.

"Below us was the tongue of the great Saskatchewan glacier which, rising steadily, was silhouetted against an angry cloud-banked sky that the setting sun shot with yellow and orange light. Between Mounts Castleguard and Athabaska the wind was whipping the snow down on to the glacier where it was carried along like dust before a great giant's broom. Beyond that sun-shot horizon lay our goal, a desert of snow and ice, devoid of shelter; a place of sudden storm and burning brightness; a high valley of ice built up for centuries between two magnificent mountain ranges, with mighty glaciers escaping from the awful pressure, projecting forth between the mountains . . . a magic place, but little known and only touched in winter; a beckoning area of mystery for which we had toiled so many miles. . . ."

They camped that night near the edge of the glacier. It was then fourteen below zero. "A wind was blowing and getting into bed unfrozen was accomplished by numerous twists and turns which left no portions exposed to the mercy of the cold for many seconds. The night's sleep was more a nightmare than a sleep as we spent most of the night trying to keep our feet from freezing, though

White, being wiser, kept his moccasins on and stood the ordeal in fairly good shape."

It was twenty-four below the next morning, "but after an hour we were all thoroughly warmed up. . . . About eleven o'clock a high wind was funnelled over the glacier and came whooping along, carrying snow with it, and we faced into it with parka hoods up and extra mittens on, the wind cutting our faces like a knife." Late in the afternoon they reached a ridge, 11,000 feet in altitude, that gave them a splendid view over the fields.

"The shifting winds exposed to view a mountain panorama of this vast, icy desert. Off to the south, perhaps six miles away, but seemingly a stone's throw, Mount Bryce (11,507) stood out, one of the most glorious of all these gorgeous peaks. Mount Castleguard (10,096), closer still, but still at least a mile away, seemed dwarfed by the high altitude from which it was viewed; while Mount Athabaska (11,452) seemed not a mountain at all, but a pile of snow.

"To the north and close, in fact we were nearly at its summit, sprawled the Snow Dome (11,340), topographical centre of the fields. And looking west the monarch of all these peaks, Mount Columbia (12,294), the second highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, stood boldly out against the setting sun. To the south-west ran a range of mountains, the names of which none of us could call to mind, and it was far too cold to handle maps."

But conditions were unfavourable and unpromising and they decided to forgo a longer stay on the inviting ice-fields. It was necessary to cross several dangerous crevasses in the dusk in returning.

"White was in the lead, Edwards next and I last. White's ski-tail broke through the snow and Edwards, close behind, turned aside from the broken snow. Suddenly the snow gave way and he was suspended from his elbows, his skis dangling in space and looking down for many feet into a huge crevass. No time was lost in rescuing him, and we all took a few minutes off to get back to normal, while to add to the eeriness of the situation a

huge ice-fall came roaring and plunging down the Snow Dome to land with a shattering crash on the glacier.

"Decidedly the glacier was unsafe, so to choose the lesser of the two evils we went along the wall of Athabaska. Here ice-falls had landed and the crushed ice was filled with drifted snow, making a rough but safe path so far as crevasses were concerned. But overhead hung suspended tons upon hundreds of tons of ice. For nearly half a mile this dangerous route was followed, and no time was lost as we sped under the overhanging menace. . . ."

By three in the morning they had reached the cabin they sought for shelter, had cooked a meal and crawled into their bags.

After breakfast at nine they had a cupful of porridge left. There could be no waiting to rest up. They had to continue on to where they had cached supplies and equipment at Graveyard Flats.

From there on, however, the last sixty or seventy miles, wrote Weaver, were pretty much of a picnic. They made a return traverse over Molar Pass, thus crossing it in both directions, just to drop in on their friends at Skoki camp, and then hit the home trail towards Louise.

I wish I could remember more of Edwards, and I wish I had known of the trip he made, just for the fun of it. It is always interesting to see a man who has hung over a crevass with only two friends to help him, and 150 odd miles between them and civilization.

II

At Skoki my anxious *alter ego* was established as my constant companion. He had been psychologically resurrected when I was frightened on skis for the first time in several years at Norquay above Banff; but as I followed my new friends at Skoki up into the grey uncertainty of my first morning of high alpine ski-ing, he fell into pace beside me, and followed me thereafter like a shadow.

"Look how high those mountains are," he'd be pointing out unnecessarily to me as I toiled up the track broken

by Jim Boyce in the deep snow. "This is a very steep slope," he'd remark comfortingly as we traversed a shoulder high above the tree-line. Then, after an hour's climbing: "See how high you are now. It makes you dizzy, doesn't it?"

But if he was diabolical when I climbed, if he taunted me into hysterical falls and plunges when, as Jim also said, I'd reappear fifty feet farther on, he was also generous in his praise if I succeeded.

"That was marvellous, wasn't it?" he'd agree with me at the end of a long run, just as if he'd done it all himself. "You did well, your knees are knocking together now, but you did well. In fact you are wonderful."

And as he'd pat me invisibly on the back I'd do a round-about jump on my skis and head enthusiastically back up the slope.

I was introduced to what I call the High Country by easy stages visually as well as physically. My first morning of ski-ing was in a flat, grey light, broken by moments of brightness. A heavy sky slid by, dusting the heavily laden trees by the camp with still more snow, but showing gaps between the clouds that gave promise of better weather to come.

When we had climbed towards Deception Pass, over which I had come the night before, and had made a partial ascent up the flank of a small summit by the pass, the visibility across Skoki Valley was poor. The falling snow obscured the scenery like mist, but when there came a pause it would dissipate, and there would be glimpses of the giants about me and of the ranges bordering the valley that were almost more thrilling than an unobstructed view could have been of the whole panorama.

I was making my acquaintance with a world I should learn to love passionately, a world with which I was already infatuated in anticipation. It was a world of simple elements: the sky, the mountains and the snow. Trees dropped away until they were a confused blurr that filled the floor of the valleys; then came the open sweeps, the towering cliffs, and the jagged horizons of this sublime

Upper World. When man was discovered in it he seemed like an insect interloper.

As I watched the figure of Art, my red-haired friend from Calgary, climb enterprisingly high above me on the afternoon of that first day, the insignificance of man seemed to be thrown into relief.

"That gives me the willies," I said to the chubby little man from Minneapolis who was near me as I looked up at the speck that stood out against the sky on the crest of a ridge.

My neighbour was a cautious skier, and he climbed slowly. I found later that he had an injured knee, that he was alive, thanks to modern medical treatment and would be finished if it were stopped, and that he had made the two hundred odd mile trip into the wilderness from Jasper to the Columbia ice-fields and back. But none of that information came from him. He would just chuckle and pull the legs of the guides, and produce things for which he said he had no need. For instance, my ears had been cold and he gave me a black head-band that I still have. He had dozens of them, he said, dozens.

As I was speaking he was looking up at Art speculatively. "I'll just stick round a bit and get my wind," he remarked, as I panted and puffed beside him, leaning on my ski-poles. "You must be tired now. You've done a lot for the first day. If you follow our tracks you'll run back to camp in a few minutes. . . ."

So after a pause I headed gingerly down-grade towards camp, and the little man stayed behind, to get his breath—and to keep an eye on Art.

That evening in the main cabin our numbers were increased by Victor Kutchera the guide, by the four people from Vancouver, and Rupert Edwards. Vic arrived with his boots frozen. The leather sounded like hardwood when he rapped it with his knuckles, and he said it helped insulate his feet. There was talk about the ski-races at Banff, a later stage of which the new-comers had seen, and about avalanches, which were apparently something that should be avoided in the mountains.

I wondered, as I crawled into my sleeping-bag that night, just what they were and whether I would ever be lucky enough to see one.

III

In the morning Vic, Art and my friend from Minneapolis started up through the big timber behind the camp to make a morning tour along the slope of Skoki mountain. I was late in getting ready, but impatient to follow, and I hit their trail after they had been gone about a quarter of an hour. Jim Boyce and one of the girls from Vancouver started after me a few minutes later.

The trail zigzagged up through the deep snow for several hundred feet, and then began a long ascending traverse towards the tree-line. At first the trees were lofty and heavy-trunked. It was virgin timber here, never damaged by lumbering or fire, and the great pines that marched triumphantly up the steep slope were almost as overpowering as the mountains themselves. Then the pines gave way to spruce and junipers, and the skeletons of larch, and after three-quarters of an hour I had followed the ski-tracks of my friends to far above the trees. I could look down into Skoki Valley, where the camp was completely hidden, and towards Deception Pass and Fossil and Ptarmigan peaks in the neighbourhood I had visited the day before.

There was a steady breeze blowing in my face, and as my route climbed higher along the slope of the mountain and rounded a shoulder it was uncomfortably cold. The snow higher up was no longer deep, but hard under my skis and blown into a wave-marked surface. At one point the wind had exposed the jagged rock and debris that slipped down in the summer from the cliffs above, and I took off my skis and carried them over this portion as I observed from the trail the others in the lead had done. When their footsteps led back on to the snow again, it was hard to see the marks at first, so firm was the surface, and I continued on foot round a shoulder of the slope.

I was feeling lonely now for I had seen no one for an

hour, had not been able to catch up to those in front nor yet had been overtaken. The landscape began so very far below me and swept up the slope to cliffs so very far above. The valleys and ranges, that were aligned in vast vistas converging towards me, were designed on such a grand scale. It would be a relief to see someone.

My skis were cutting into my collar-bone as I carried them. . . . I would put them down and wait for the two behind. I thrust them into the hard snow so they stood upright and looked about me. If I continued a little I should see more of the foreground of the landscape, perhaps catch sight of the skiers ahead. So I tramped ahead on foot and topped the sloping crest ahead.

Then I stopped amazed. There was a broad open sweep of snow slope slanting gently down to the forest far below at the left. A hundred yards ahead of me the surface of the snow was broken. A great area seemed to have dropped away and slid down upon itself. I could see where the upper crust of the snow had slumped and was patterned by a series of jagged horizontal cracks. Below it the snow was jumbled in a great mass of blocks and fragments that spread out until it had come to rest.

This was very interesting. This must be one of the forms of avalanche that had been discussed in camp the night before. Had the others seen it, I wondered?

Then I noticed the tracks. They separated from being a single track, where they followed the leader in climbing and broke up into three distinct tracks as they headed downward. Here was a fine open slope of hard snow, ideal for turning; and each skier would choose his own course, and swing back and forth across the slope as often as he wished.

But the tracks as they divided disappeared into the area of broken snow. Then the slide must have occurred after they passed.

If they had gone on, however, where were they? I looked quickly over the landscape ahead. I could see for several miles, and there were no figures in sight above the tree-line. Moreover, their tracks did not emerge at the far side.

My heart bumped suddenly inside me. Had they been caught in the avalanche? It was said they were dangerous. I remembered people got killed by them.

I put my hands to my mouth and called.

"Hul . . . l . . . l . . . oooo." The sound seemed to loose itself in space. There was no echo back, no answering cry, no sign of movement.

Then I gasped with relief for I saw, to the left far down the slope, where the ski-tracks emerged from the area of broken snow. The avalanche then must have happened after they had gone.

But I looked sharply. There were only *two* ski-tracks. They converged into a single trail and headed back in the direction from which I had come.

I called again, and still there was no answer. Then I began a frantic scramble back along my route. I passed my skis and left them untouched. I was due to see Jim Boyce who was following me any minute. I could have wept with joy when I saw him making his way with the Vancouver girl across the rocky shoulder.

I shouted to him: had he seen the others: there was something funny in the snow ahead: it looked like an avalanche.

He hurried forward, carrying his skis. Then he stopped, looked down the slope, called and waved. Yes, he could see the others: Kutchera and one other. They were far down the slope, but not out of ear-shot.

Had they seen a snow slide? No? Where was the third man? Where was Art?

Faintly the reply came: he was just behind them somewhere. He had gone back to take another down-hill run.

But I knew better. I had seen from above the trail behind them. And there had been no sign of Art, only the snow slide.

Kutchera started running back over the hard snow and occasionally plunging through with one foot. If there is danger of avalanche, I was to learn later, and you must cross a slope, it is less dangerous if you traverse it on foot.

Boyce and I ran back to the crest overlooking the

avalanche. We shouted with relief. There was Art fixing his skis or something at the edge of the broken snow far below.

He waved to us. He was safe.

Boyce went back to take the others back to camp, and I skied down and joined Kutchera. The slope was hard and curiously hollow in its sound as I slewed across it; but it was a gentle enough incline, and it seemed queer that it should slide or be dangerous.

Together Kutchera and I reached Art where he was poking about among the blocks of snow.

What had happened? Was he all right?

Art looked white and subdued. He was looking for one of his ski-poles, he said. It had disappeared. He turned over a few of the big blocks of snow with an effort and fished about with his remaining stick, but there was nothing to be found.

Oh, yes, he said, he had been caught in the avalanche. See, his trousers had been torn badly where he was dragged down against some out-cropping rocks.

Gradually the story took shape.

He had decided to go back for a second run over the slope the three had found so interesting, and the two others had gone ahead. Then, the one minute that morning that the party was separated and he was alone, the accident had happened.

He had been tramping diagonally upward when he felt the snow give slightly. "Going Wooff," they called it. Cracks appeared across the slope above him and beneath his feet, tiny cracks, but he knew what had happened. He remembered in a flash what Kutchera had told him to do if he got caught in an avalanche: loosen your bindings.

He reached down and plucked one binding loose. It was an arrangement with a catch on the ski ahead of the toe-iron, and one gesture would do it. There was not time for him to reach the other.

Then he didn't know what was happening. He seemed to be engulfed, smothered by the snow, turned, tumbled and twisted this way and that. The snow crushed down

upon him and he felt himself being dragged against some rocks. He speculated then as to how long it would be before he was found; he knew he was lost, and yet he was detached.

In a few seconds that seemed an eternity the snow came to a rest. His head was at the surface and one arm was free. He lay still for a time.

Then I had appeared on the sky-line far above him and had called. He waved one arm, but I did not see him. Then I had disappeared. He worked himself free and found one ski and a ski-stick. The other ski was still clamped to his boot, and he had to undo the binding to get it clear.

Kutchera scrambled about the snow, weighing the blocks in his arms, looking up the slope from whence it had come, questioning, explaining, scolding, comforting and gradually easing some of the tension that must have existed in Art's mind.

He said that it was a wind slab avalanche, and that the summer slope or natural slope of the mountain at that point must have been concave and quite steep higher up. Then the snow had been driven against it by the prevailing wind, and a new and almost convex surface had been formed during the winter.

Sliding down it on skis might not jar the structure, but the weight and movement of the climbing skier had been enough to break the slight arch and tension of the snow. The sustaining balance was broken, the snow dropped down the steeper internal slope, and the whole mass slid down and piled up upon itself at the bottom.

He drew little diagrams in the snow to illustrate his point, said this was the most dangerous of all forms of avalanche and the most difficult to detect because the visible slope mattered little. He pointed out the proper points to probe first for a body; observed that had Art been buried it might have taken many hours to find him.

He was philosophical: "You must think of this as another birthday. You have been born again. Five minutes ago,





and you might have been finished. Your Life begins again."

As he talked I remembered a little of other forms of avalanche discussed the night before. There were some things a skier in the east would never see. To me, they had been something abstract and as unlikely as an earthquake . . . until I had this vicarious adventure with one.

I know them now as a danger that need never prevent one from ski-ing in alpine country, but only a danger that must be guarded against when you are there. They are predictable as much as weather is predictable; but whereas you don't have to take shelter until it starts to rain heavily, you must be well out of reach before a slope starts to avalanche.

There were, Kutchera had told us, avalanches of wet snow and of dry snow. They are the surface or even the whole body of snow slipping down a slope when a change in temperature, a movement or even a sound will break the structure supporting the snow. It may only be an inch, a fraction of an inch over the surface; but when it covers a few acres, funnels down a gully and pours like a waterfall onto another slope below, the ultimate and cumulative effect can be devastating. A wind is sometimes set up by the cascading, sliding snow that lays waste trees by the side of the avalanche as it carves its way into the forests of the lower slope. Sometimes the snow will push its way across the flat and up the opposite slope.

It was this variety of snow-slide that made the early days of the railway in the Rockies so hazardous, but that was now less threatening with tunnels and snow-sheds, and steel equipment.

As we started ski-ing back towards camp, Kutchera recounted several anecdotes about avalanches. I could hear the shaken Art commenting in monosyllables.

"Yes," he would say occasionally, or, "No." The yarns didn't call for much else.

Vic was an Austrian and one of the most expert skiers and most experienced guides in the Rockies. He had seen a lot of avalanches and told us how they wiped out alpine

villages, how people were buried by them but how they sometimes lived, how they were found with rods, and how some had lucky escapes.

He told the story of the man who was buried deep in a light snow-avalanche and who was able to work in the darkness with his arms and to clear a space before his face so he could breathe properly. But he couldn't tell whether he was upside down or, if he was to dig, in what direction he should begin. He got his watch from his pocket and hung it by the chain. He then discovered by this plumb-line that he was on his side, and he knew which way he should dig to escape. He worked his way to the surface and was saved.

But his yarns, as we skied along, Art with one pole, were not all as encouraging. He explained how he had dug many bodies out from avalanches. There had been nineteen in all, I think he said.

Some of them had been in a terrible state. They would be twisted and broken by the snow . . . particularly with windslab avalanches like the one Art was in . . . which showed how important it was to get free of one's skis so they couldn't twist one's legs. He had seen porters with their necks broken by their pack-boards.

"The pressure of the snow usually made them vomit," said Victor. "It was horrible."

I could hear Art grunting occasionally.

"Oh," was all he replied to that anecdote.

Chapter Six

FOR THE LOVE OF LOUISE

I

AND that afternoon I had to leave and ski alone from beyond the crest of Deception Pass down to Lake Louise station.

Most of my life I spend regretting lost opportunities, social, sexual, or geographical. There was an intriguing blonde I timidly ignored when I was eighteen; and for years I cursed my lack of enterprise in not visiting the Pacific coast when I spent the summer of 1929 in the Rockies. Time, luckily, has adjusted all such matters, but they provoke me yet; and now my precipitate departure from Skoki will for ever annoy.

Skoki could have produced so much more ski-ing had I given it the chance. Its immediate surroundings are not unlike those of Andermatt, with more trees, though comparisons are unwise and likely inaccurate; and the major expeditions that could have been made from there were infinite.

I should have climbed several of the accessible peaks in the neighbourhood, perhaps tried a first winter ascent of something, for climbs of that sort are to be had for the asking in the Rockies; and I should have spent many days exploring the valleys in every direction. It was superlatively attractive country—and it's a good thing I didn't attempt to do very much about it, as my ability as an alpine skier had a long way to develop.

As this is not a Guide I'll not give the details of my geographical shortcomings but continue my journey to Louise.

With the memory of the avalanche fresh in my mind,

I was escorted by my friend Hansen to the top of the pass and past a section known to be exposed to slides. From there I continued alone. The trail was broken, it was easy going, and after the first portion it was below the tree-line. Still I felt very isolated, and skied gingerly. The track made by the skis of the last party cut across the flat plane of Ptarmigan Lake and zigzagged briefly over Boulder Pass. It threaded down through great rocks and boulders and the warped stumps of a few trees, and finally arrived at the little half-way cabin perched on a promontory looking south down the valley towards the Bow.

I paused there and went in. Fresh wood and kindling were by the stove ready to light. If anyone came played-out by ski-ing, a fire would be easy to start. It was ready to give warmth and shelter; but to me, who had not time to stop to light a fire and make a pail of tea, the little cabin seemed barren and forbidding. The friendly spirits who had been in attendance two days before had departed: it was ten degrees below zero Fahrenheit within those four walls, and the chill seemed greater than without.

While ski-ing down Ptarmigan Valley into thicker timber, and having to pole or *lang-lauf* where in my weariness on the inward journey the trail had seemed all up-grade, I thought of all the pleasant people I had known intimately for forty-eight hours, and whom I should never probably see again. There was Kutchera, the guide, who was reported in the papers two summers later as effecting a brave rescue in the course of his climbing; the nice people from Minneapolis, who had skied in most parts of the world but whose affection for the Rockies knew no bounds; Jim Boyce, the gentle host who looked after his guests so well despite the difficulties of such surroundings.

The latter belongs to a breed of man the Rockies can't do without. He knows his job, he can handle men, he will serve his "dudes," his guests, to the best of his ability. There is far more to guiding, in winter or summer, than in transporting a party through the mountains. It calls for wisdom and understanding and tolerance, for infinite thoughtfulness, and for an all-surviving sense of

humour. It calls for woodcraft and horse-sense that is not part of the temperament of everyone, and that can only come with years of experience. Younger guides may be good horsemen or nervy skiers or glib conversationalists, but they need to study their elders for manners, and to let develop a little of an innate niceness I always feel to exist in a mountain-westerner.

The "dude," the urbanite, when he thinks he is roughing it with three or four men to look after him, can be an unlovely specimen. He gets dirty, slovenly and rude. His inhibitions fly, and he reverts to type. When a guide has to endure much along these lines, it takes a lot of character.

I knew an old Indian guide from Biscotasing who worked for a couple of summers at the Seignior Club in Eastern Canada. His name was Alec Espaniel, a friend of Grey Owl's, and on several occasions he looked after my father, my mother and myself on minor expeditions. From the depths of Alec's usually silent soul my father one evening fished the story that he had once had to guide a couple of youths from Philadelphia, and that their language and behaviour had so shocked him that he had taken them back and dropped them after the first day of camping. I like to think of that salutary lesson coming from where it did.

Poor Alec, by no means an old man, passed away a year or so ago within a few days of the death of his son who died of tuberculosis. His daughter is a school-teacher, and I am sure she is a very kind and capable one.

But, a few paragraphs back, I was ski-ing seventeen miles down-grade to Lake Louise station, a heavy pack was on my back, and my heart was in my mouth. I must make the most of them.

Actually, the down-bits are hard to translate into print. The up-bits provide prolonged agonies, soliloquies and jaundiced meditation. This book is full of them; but the down-grade—it's all over in an instant.

For instance, here in the late afternoon I left the chilly Half-way Hut, and then just about the same time I arrived down on the flats leading to Lake Louise station. The

interval was crammed with scrambling rushes across the level, with long runs down through soft powder snow among widely spread trees, with exciting battles for balance on the harder trail, with a few falls, and with many instants of flitting past trees willy-nilly at a pace that made me dizzy.

When I saw a human being for the first time since leaving Deception Pass, I felt relieved, and was glad of an excuse to stop and gossip. He was from a construction camp near the station and he told me a little of the highway on which he was working, being built by the National Parks of Canada from Banff Park up to Jasper Park. When complete, which should be very soon, it will be one of the most interesting motor tours in the world, and I shall make it eagerly, and a little jealously, for I rode over much of the country on a horse close on ten years ago. He had that day motored to the head of the road which they keep ploughed near Bow Pass; and had I the time and opportunity I should have been able to tap more skiterrain with the aid of his truck.

There was another pause this time in the little hotel by the picturesque toy-station at Lake Louise, for an interchange of phone messages to confirm my arrangements for the morrow, and my accommodation with the Swiss guides at Lake Louise, and to eat a lone and slightly depressed meal. I seldom have the common sense not to overdo my ski-ing early in a season, and what with my ski-ing in the morning and my thirteen-mile return trip in the afternoon, I had by then done enough. But I was bound to get up to the guides' chalet that night, and I succeeded. But the next day I paid the price.

As dusk was falling I set out, and in the darkness, more by good luck than instinct or knowledge, I followed the right route which was completely obliterated by newly fallen snow. Here was an up-bit where I dwelt long and sorrowfully on my own foolishness, on my almost pathetic weakness, and on the pointlessness of trapesing alone through such a wilderness.

It is a comforting illusion of mine that I am very frail

and weak, so that when I manage to survive an ordinary test of endurance, I am obviously a hero. But the simple journey from the station, by way of a short cut, to near the Château of Lake Louise was fatiguing only because I had to break trail, because I was uncertain of my direction, for it was overcast and snowing a little and there were no stars visible, and because it came at the end of a long day.

When I would stop I could hear nothing but the click of my pulse beating in my ears. I could see nothing but the grey whiteness of the trees that stood about me shrouded in snow like a myriad of giant ghosts. I could feel nothing but the cold that numbed the tips of my fingers through my mitts, and that made the lobes of my ears tingle. But my body was glowing with warmth generated by the exercise and by the nameless wrath that brewed unhappily and unreasonably within. I was tired and I wanted to go to bed, and the Lord alone knew when I would get there.

As a classic touch when I saw the one light that marked my destination, I fell over a small bank into what was in summer a tennis-court. Landing flat on my back, I was held firmly by my pack from moving and was only able to thrash angrily about with my skis like a crab turned over on its shell. I had to slip out of my pack to get to my feet, and I didn't have the pleasure of having anyone hear my prolonged and querulous cursings.

I had arrived at a strange hour and at a strange season at one of the most famous and popular summer resorts in Canada. The bare bulk of the Château Lake Louise loomed on my right, the deep forest that clothed the mountains was close on my left, and in the immediate foreground was the chalet of the Swiss guides from which a single light gleamed a welcome. It was all silent, still—"a banquet-hall deserted"—a little eerie to one who had known the place at its gayest season. I was glad that I should find human beings in this darkness of suspended animation.

The Swiss guides were brought out from Switzerland many years ago. They are more Swiss than anything in

Switzerland. They have done, in their day, as much difficult climbing as any master of their generation back at home, for the Rockies, from a sporting view-point, had been relatively unclimbed when they came, and first-ascents lay ready for the taking. They are slow, gentle, rugged men, with alert eyes, wrinkled, weathered faces, and a great wisdom and tact in the handling of human beings. They have their chalet by the Château Lake Louise where they are quartered in summer ready to guide climbers, and where three or four live and work in relays in the winter, shovelling snow from the roofs of the buildings, and making periodic maintenance patrols to the various summer bungalow camps.

"Snow is only beautiful to those who have nothing more to do with it than look at it" was the home-truth I found framed in the chalet; and I'm afraid the same realistic and pessimistic attitude must have been theirs towards climbing and climbers. If someone else's pleasure becomes your business, it ceases to be a pleasure; and when you become a professional, most amateurs seem fearful fools.

During the winter they have to shift many tons of snow, cutting it in great blocks and moving it on a Swiss hand-sled that is, I suppose, the only one of its kind in Canada. When they ski it is objectively, as a French-Canadian trapper snow-shoes methodically round his traps.

In the green valley of the Columbia between the rugged ranges of the Rockies and Selkirks they have established their families in Swiss chalets on the mountain-side in a tiny community of their own making: Edelweiss. You can see it from the train, and you think it charming, and just a little sad.

And yet I do not believe nostalgia would ever drive the Swiss back to their native land; not the younger ones, certainly. Given reasonable success and human happiness, the emigrant soon finds himself claimed by the soil of Canada. He calls it "home." He thinks of it as "home." He will romance and sentimentalize over his "old country," but if he returns there he usually decides it is only for a visit,

and he goes back again to the land of his adoption. We need more men in Canada like the Swiss guides, like the Scotsmen who pioneered as explorers, trappers and builders. We need more Swedes and Norwegians and country-folk from the English provinces who are independent and self-supporting. The picture of a Canada teeming with millions of people is to me an industrial nightmare portending ruination to the country and disaster to an over-mechanized world; but I think Canada needs and deserves to see grow her fine basic stocks, French and English speaking, and to have them leavened a little by races genuinely adapted to and attracted by our country and our climate.

When I went in to the chalet to the guides after my tramp through the darkness, I found that they were expecting me, had set aside the best bed for me, and had hot tea ready in no time. It was humanly very warming.

I was sorry to miss Edward Feuz, with whom I had climbed in company with Mr. Amery; and I was saddened to hear one of the absent guides had just lost his son, a grown man, through blood-poisoning. We gossiped about climbing and ski-ing, looked at photographs round the kitchen table, among which I spotted a snap of Georgia Englehardt who is as decorative an asset to climbing as anything wearing trousers, and I went wearily to bed.

II

But once in bed I couldn't sleep. I thought of the guttural gossip we had had over the tea. I thought of all the crystal-clear snapshots I had been shown. They were good photographers, these guides, and the prints gave me settings for memories of the summer I had spent in the Rockies in 1929. They had nothing to do with ski-ing, but because they were intimately associated with Lake Louise, they came to me, warm and human and three-dimensional.

They had to do with walks by myself over passes, foolish walks, for it is unwise to go alone in the wilderness, particularly if you are a greenhorn, don't know the way, and don't know your strength. They flashed to a camp of the

Alpine Club at Rogers Pass and my experiences climbing there and at Mount Amery. They wandered so that I found myself looking between the wagging ears of a mountain pony. There were spots of sunshine that dappled the trail ahead where it found a casual way between the lofty trunks and over mossy logs, worn deep where they lay across the path.

And then in the queer round-about way that the mind works, that fascinating, unexpected way that suddenly takes you back through the years and lets you live again as you were for a fleeting instant, I remembered what I was thinking.

I had been longing for someone, and I could visualize every tree-trunk and log and patch of sunshine at the moment that I wished for her. But for whom I had longed I couldn't recall.

However selfish young men are, however they have the wanderlust, they usually want to share their havens with another. Someone they have seen, someone they know, someone with whom they are then in love, would surely enjoy their desert or their mountain or their wilderness. When you are very young, as I was then, twenty-two, you know for sure that your love would share your hardships: your lumpy sleeping-bag, your milkless tea. Your love goes with you wherever you wander, and you have no knowledge of the waspish temper of a woman when she is tired, no understanding of her realistic approach to matters of simple comfort.

By the time I skied in the Rockies I had learned enough to cherish no illusions. Anyone I thought about then would no more enjoy carrying a pack and breaking trail than she would swimming in the Arctic. But I was still fatuous enough to be impatient with her for it.

The memory that was taking shape, however, was untrammelled by any common sense. It was something deliciously simple and romantic. It was one of those things that make you wish for those youthful times of blissful ignorance—until you realize that you would have to live again through the agonies of learning. It was one

of those episodes a man, unless he is careful, will remember with a watery eye—and make him resentful of a life that can no more be handled with youthful and almost adolescent directness.

I could remember the horse's ears, and the trail, and the yearning, and gradually a face came through and the memory was given a personality. I was longing as I rode along the trail for a little girl I had met at Lake Louise.

She had come from nowhere, had passed into oblivion and has never since had the temerity to reappear. She had been there two days. The evening she had arrived I had danced with her. That is the conventional and romantic way to fall in love at that stage. The next day we had ridden together and it had rained. And the next morning her parents or her uncle and aunt or her party had moved off, and she was gone. That was all there was to it. My susceptible heart selected her of all the thousands of people I saw pass through in the course of my work that summer; and when I rode away into the hills thereafter, her spirit came with me.

But I had reason to believe she would love the things I loved: the horses and the trees and the sunshine and the endless panoramas, the smell of a camp-fire and the sighing of the wind in the spruce. Our happiness had been shared in such charmingly impractical surroundings, for in our one ride together we had ventured into them.

From the windows of the Château, lovely Lake Louise mirrors one of the most famous, the most classically theatrical arrangements of mountain scenery in the whole of the tourist world. As you know, mountains come from either side to form a gateway, to frame a great slope of mountain, and the crest of the slope and the high skyline of the vista is crowned by a glacier. It is a set illuminated by more trick effects than were ever conceived for the stage. Now the lake is grey, now blue, now green. The waters are dead, and then they are alive. Glacial sediment held in suspension does all this, they say; but who cares for the reason so long as the magic goes on?

The snows of the glacier are white against the blue of

the sky, or pink against great clouds. The picture, the set, divides itself into three shallow planes. There's the foreground of the lake, the middle distance of the gateway, and the background of the glacier. It is obvious that five minutes' walk will take you to the end of the lake and another five to the foot of the glacier. There is the inescapable illusion that, if one reached out far enough, one could touch the wings and the backdrop; that if one went beyond the lake one would have passed beyond the footlights; that it might swallow one, like the Looking Glass, and make life go backwards.

We had laughed and chattered as we rode along the trail together; past two trees that are inevitably photographed as providing the proper touch to the right foreground of a snapshot of the scene; down the broad pathway that skirts the right shore and swings round to the mouth of the creek draining the waters of the glaciers above into the lake.

The fragment of life came back into my mind, first as a second-hand memory, then direct and strong from its original source.

What had we laughed at? What said? None of those details came through. Just a sense of youth and happiness and of detachment, just a great awareness of the mountains that were closing in about us.

The picture had been sharp and clear when we confronted it from the conventional view-point at the foot of the lake. As we went on, it changed in character completely. The lake was not shallowly round in shape, but deep and narrow, and to reach the head of it took some time. Then forest choked the mouth of the valley and a stream brawled in the undergrowth. The trail climbed for a long time through the trees, and the waters were within earshot.

Next the path was nitched out of the rock, or let into slopes of scree like a shelf, and at one point there was a view back down the valley, down upon the trees which had dropped away one by one, down upon the long lake, and back upon the hard speck that was the hotel we had

left. It seemed unkind to see this, to see the crude mirrors and rough wiring that illuminated the picture; but we were climbing then into a world of which we had had no conception, and the wonder of it made up for all else.

The path passed beyond the land of things known, of trees and the sound of running waters. A glacier sprawled below us and the stream that drained or bled it was lost beneath. A mess of debris, or moraine, clotted the surface of the ice; but higher up it hung green and glittering; and from passes round about other glaciers converged.

This was the famous Plain of the Six Glaciers, a vast amphitheatre into whose centre we had come, and whose background, Victoria Glacier, seemed as far away as when we had started two hours before. It was a tremendous place, difficult to comprehend: exciting, beautiful, incomparable.

Mists took shape; chill winds dropped down from the ice and moved the fog in wraiths across the path; there was a drizzle of rain.

But we had glimpsed with natures acutely aware and receptive to each other and to everything about us, this alpine world that lay hidden beyond the gates, that would never be discovered by those who could only sit in a chair and look through a plate-glass window. We turned our horses back from where we had come, and rode in silence.

Lower down the rain was warm and caressing and our skin seemed cold. I remember that the girl came up beside me where the trail was wide enough for two horses at one point, and that we kissed.

How very clean and sweet it was, I thought then, to kiss lips that were wet with rain. How complete this makes the picture.

That was it. The whole memory was a picture. The little girl receded in importance among the glaciers, became one of the anonymous properties. My love of her had been about as abstract and removed from reality as my admiration of the ice that hung 5000 feet above.

But still, it was sweet and young, that kiss in the rain; and it made a nice point at which to go to sleep.

III

The next day was an anti-climax. I had decided to take it easily after my strenuous debut, but it proved I was not to take it easily enough. The weather was bad and what views I had of the scene I remembered with such quaint sentiment were now bleak and cold.

Neither I nor the weather justified the trouble taken by Ralph Harvey of Banff who motored up to Lake Louise to meet me. It involved his arising at some ungodly hour, motoring forty miles, ski-ing ten or fifteen miles through heart-breakingly heavy snow, finding the terrain he was so anxious to show to advantage appear at its worst, and then motoring another forty miles back in the dusk. That, I think, is hospitality.

Throughout my travels in the Rockies and Switzerland various people were to materialize out of the blue, take endless trouble and show the greatest kindness, and then to drop out of sight again. On skis and in life I seem to be figuratively picked up and dusted off by genii whenever I stumble. It's very spoiling and apt to make one helpless if by mistake the good genii are slow in appearing.

At any rate, Ralph Harvey turned up after breakfast, and we headed across Lake Louise towards the narrow valley that formed the base or focal point of the vista ahead. The snow was deep and there was a wind, and it proved that we had to break trail going and coming, and that snow had sifted into our tracks and obliterated them by the time we returned in the middle of the afternoon. When it came to climb up the valley that led up into the Plain of the Six Glaciers the deep snow was on top of a breakable crust, and we would have needed full-sized snow-shoes to be borne up properly. In descending the snow was too deep to allow for much free running, and every inch of the way had to be worked for.

The conditions in that deep and relatively sunless valley were bad, for the winter had been unusually cold and unrelenting, and there had been no January thaws or warm days to allow the snow to settle or form a strong crust.

Continuous and intense cold and much fresh snow does not make for good ski-ing. There must be breaks that build up surfaces and form a strong base for fresh powder snow. For that reason I suspect the early part of the winter in the Rockies produces less pleasurable ski-ing than the last month and the spring.

There was a searching wind that dropped down through the clouds that cloaked the amphitheatre, and we lunched from sandwiches and cheese and oranges, produced from our rucksacks in the lee of a great boulder. The snow had drifted away from a pocket there, and we were able to lay our skis on the edge of the snow, sit on them and hang our feet down into the space beside the wall of the rock.

My friend Harvey, president that year of the Ski Runners of the Canadian Rockies, the ski club of Banff, was an ideal companion on the trail : cheerful, quiet and patient. Even when an hour after our snack I sat down and said I was sorry but that I wasn't going any farther, he was patient. He went on a bit to see if conditions improved and then caught up to me and broke most of the trail on the return. He had red hair, a friendly grin and an unobtrusive manner that gave little indication of the influence he had and the trouble he would take to help one ; and I am eternally grateful to him. Later that year I was told that the Ski Runners had made me an honorary vice-president for the following season, though why so unexpected and great a compliment was paid me when I had been such a broken reed with their president I shall never know.

Our goal in climbing was the unromantic Tea House on the romantic Plain of the Six Glaciers, and it may have been the prospect of finding a deserted building advertising non-existent tea and buns in the midst of this white waste that depressed me. Most fatiguing, however, was the deep snow, and the prospect of twenty-two miles of ski-ing with my pack that I would have to undertake the next day.

So, when we tramped slowly above the lower tongue of the glacier and followed the ridge of a sharp arate of moraine that seemed to grow higher and steeper on either side as we advanced, and the tortured cornice on its crest

more unstable, I folded up. I tried to shelter in the lee of stream-lined hummocks of snow to recuperate ; and naturally when the time came to return—and particularly after there had been a break at the chalet of the Swiss guides and some hot tea had been introduced into the system—I was perfectly well and strong again. Fatigue, up to a point, is a mental attitude, perhaps boredom. The human body can stand a lot when it has to, but it will sit back doggedly on its haunches and refuse to budge when it seems to be getting no forrader to no purpose.

When we motored back over the road kept ploughed between Banff and Lake Louise by the Parks authorities, Harvey pointed out a bowl, or amphitheatre, high on the southern wall of the Bow Valley, where it was thought a hut or ski-camp might be later built linking up with another beyond at Sunshine. The flats and slopes about the road in the floor of the valley were clear of snow, and it presented a scene in strange contrast to the white wilderness in which we had been an hour before.

We saw some moose browsing off dead underbrush in a swamp when we turned one corner, several mule deer bounded away when we approached, and some magnificently antlered elk poised against the sky-line on a shoulder of the hill and made me weep for a camera with a 1.9 lens capable of drinking in enough light to register at that late hour. I got a snapshot, but it was faint and grey and altogether most disappointing. Near Banff we paused by the Beaver Dam by the road where the colony in summer provides a nightly show for patient tourists ; and just beyond was the permanent salt lick where you can usually guarantee to find some big horned mountain sheep. At that season there were no black bears about—they hibernate—and no goats. I've never been able to get a good look at a Rocky Mountain goat. Though they must have a fellow feeling for me, they always keep aloof and become spots against a precipice that the guide can see but I can't.

That evening, in my little room in the Mount Royal Hotel in Banff, I rearranged my clothing in piles preparatory to packing my rucksack anew for the trip into Assiniboine





camp, I had a warm and welcome bath, and turned in. I was obsessed by letters I hadn't written, notes I hadn't made, things I hadn't done ; I knew I had to be up early and ski late on the morrow, but I slept, dreamlessly and effortlessly. It was good.

Chapter Seven

AND SO TO ASSINIBOINE

I

FRIDAY, the thirteenth of March, began in one of those amazing Fords of antiquated pattern that turn up sooner or later in every travel narrative. They are a stock property. They bang, they rattle, they have no brakes, and they provide the comic relief for which the reader yearns in the midst of so much geography. At noon a rusty stove that nearly smoked us out of a log cabin crops up, and that, too, has a familiar smell to it. The thought that I'm resorting to trick effects brings a blush.

But so it was. I piled my skis and my rucksack into this car, this Mack Sennet comedy car, and we left Banff. "We" this time involved Sam Evans, whose great hands seemed to envelop the small steering-wheel, a nameless confederate who drove it back to town, and myself. I didn't count, however, as I had worn myself thin with exercise, and was not all there, anyway. I travelled in that trance that shields all those unaccustomed to early rising from the harsh brutalities of the hour; and I followed myself about with an astral detachment of mind that surveyed the scene with godlike calm.

The little car charged across the broad bridge over the Bow and swung west on two wheels towards Sundance Canyon. I have spared you much geography to date, but as I was undertaking to ascend the valley of Healy Creek and then that of Brewster Creek, and would the next day drop down into Mount Assiniboine Ski Camp, run by Erling Strom, I feel they should be mentioned. The names have a charm in themselves, and as thirty-five miles of ski-ing separated the camp from Banff, they are mentioned with

the inference that they outline what was to be quite a trip.

The general direction, in case you like to get orientated, was south and west from Banff. And Banff is in the valley of the Bow not many miles west of the Gap, which constitutes the eastern portal of the railway's route through the Rockies. I had just returned from Lake Louise, which is on the south wall of the Bow Valley, forty odd miles west of Banff, and from Skoki, which lay thirteen odd miles north and up from Lake Louise station. Got it?

Mount Assiniboine is the famous 11,830-ft. pyramid so resembling the Matterhorn that lies on the continental divide and boundary line between the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia ; and the camp and Lake Magog, which it overlooked, lay just over the border in British Columbia. Its charm, or its disadvantage, according to your viewpoint, is that it is so many miles away from anything.

There seemed to be little snow about Banff itself, but by the time the little car had followed the road to Sundance Canyon there was plenty of it. Heading up a fire-rangers' road through the forest it began to labour badly, though its skinny, high wheels kept ploughing through far longer than I thought possible, and on a steep grade it stalled permanently. The great thing was to keep her going as hard and as fast as possible so that the road would be broken and the journey on skis shortened.

I climbed down and faced the reality of ski-ing the remaining thirty odd miles with creaking reluctance. I swallowed my regrets, however, when I saw my companion, Evans, hoist a huge pack on his back containing his personal outfit and a crate with fifteen dozen eggs. The weight was so great that he used a tump-line over his head to distribute the load. If he could do it under such a burden, surely I could under mine.

He was a slow, good-natured soul was Sam Evans, wise and observant and uncommunicative. He was rugged-faced, huge-framed, with the strength of a moose and the steady determination of a mountain pony. He wore a fantastic arrangement of canvas overalls hitched tight with

garters that was probably about the most efficient, if exotic, ski costume he could have selected. His sister, whom I met later in Banff, and who was about the smartest and most Tyroliantly fashionable figure I saw in the west, was in some contrast. They both hailed from the eastern States.

But could Sam ski ! He skied thirty odd miles with his fifteen dozen eggs and didn't break one of them ; he broke trail, and as fresh snow had fallen there was a lot to break ; he crossed two high passes and took a straighter course down-grade than I dared at that time ; and I only saw him fall once, which was when he was climbing through thick, burnt-over timber and his skis slipped. He sat down with a grunt. He didn't even swear, he just grunted. I should have made the landscape hideous with complaint ; I would have made it clear that I alone in all the world had to suffer so acutely ; but Sam kept his peace and got up again.

Here was a skier who was a good bushman, who had the patience and the strength and determination and the experience to cope with the wilderness in winter. The Rockies, if you are to face them very much alone, demand something more than good ski-ing—they need savvy. If a ski breaks, if you're hurt, if someone else is hurt and you are alone with them, you must know what to do. You can't sit down in the sun and wait for someone to come along. There may be no one for days. How cold it is you realise when you stop. If you don't know how to survive it when you are crippled, you are done for.

The National Parks authorities, largely, I believe, through Major Jennings, the superintendent at Banff, have licensed guides for ski-ing, and required them to have certain knowledge and experience. They must know about avalanches, about making a brush camp in the open, about cooking and first aid, and naturally about the country itself. When I was there Kutchera and Strom were the only two ski-mountaineer guides, men qualified to lead as skiers and climbers in summer and winter ; but the number of ski guides, recruited largely from local lads, many of whom worked at packing for "dudes" in summer, that is, running

pack-horse trips through the hills, was growing. There were several among them who had thousands of miles of ski-ing in the Rockies to their credit. Sam was one.

He thought nothing a few days later in ski-ing over a hundred miles—roughly the round trip between Assiniboine and Skoki via Banff, so that he could take part in the Rankin Cup downhill races at Skoki. They would last about a minute in running time. It was reminiscent of the brave days of the first classic Holmenkollen in Scandinavia, when a wolf-hunter skied in some hundreds of miles from his traps, won the race, and forthwith set out on the return journey.

It would have been interesting, and even a little terrifying, to watch Sam compete, for he skied in an erect position bent a little forward, and his arms rose and fell as he fought for balance like the wings of an eagle. Though I didn't know it at the time, this differed little from the styles of the Swiss and Austrian racers I was to see the next winter in the Alps. But he took everything straight, and to see this great gesticulating figure charging bravely down a slope was a sight not lightly forgotten.

Our trail was a pony trail in summer, and it zigzagged up through the forest, hair-pinned a little awkwardly in gulleys, and finally lead into a broader valley with an easier gradient, up which we ascended towards Brewster Cabin. For lunch we paused in a dilapidated log cabin that had once been a lumber camp, Douglas Creek Cabin it was called; and there, as I say, the rusty "property" stove leaked. The wind breathed through cracks in the walls, and there was a cold and dirty gloom that clung about the old bunks and about the grimy floor.

I'm sure they all have tales to tell, such empty cabins, even as are told by Grey Owl; and they give me a strong sense of the past, almost more than buildings in the old world that may be far more ancient. Centuries hurry by them with the passage of a few years. Nature, in the heart of the forest, is quicker to obliterate the handiwork of man than in the open country. Trees grow up through the floor, vines bury the walls, a passing bear tears down a

door because he smells a lingering trace of stale jam, porcupines eat away the shelving where the wood became saturated with the grease of cooking, dampness rusts the stove and rot eats into the fabric.

I have seen so many little cabins falling to ruin : in the beautiful wilderness of Laurentide Park near Lake St. John where the lover of Maria Chapdelaine may have gone long ago, never to return, to work in the shanties ; in the valleys of the Rockies ; in the tortured inlets of the bare-boned flank of Georgian Bay ; on the beautiful lakes of Ontario. They were built by trappers or lumbermen or pioneers who fought a piteous battle against Nature where they had hoped to find a land flowing with milk and honey.

They reek still with the stink of human beings. The ghosts of their former occupants hurry away when a squirrel drops a nut through a chink in the roof, and the long dead strains of the endless ditties of the back country rise and fall when the wind sighs in the trees and brown leaves gather in the corners to add their mass to the matted shroud that thickens as the seasons pass.

I may write of such small cabins with an excess of sentiment, for I helped build one when I was a little boy, and I have often wondered what has become of it. The forces of destruction were at work even when it was erected, I am afraid, because we had neglected to peel off the bark and wood-ticks or borers were augering away creakily when we slept in it the first night. The turmoil was too great; and we never slept in it, my father or I, again.

He, of course, did most of the work, and probably had a man to help him. But I am fully persuaded to this day that I did it all myself: notching the logs so that they interlocked at the corners, stuffing moss in the chinks between the logs, and fitting a rough door-frame. However, as I was only eight, I probably didn't.

It was a long afternoon, and night had fallen before Sam Evans and I reached the Brewster Creek Cabin where we were to spend the night. Twenty odd miles with a pack and uphill all the way is a long way, and I was very tired.

This was a first-class cabin, the property of the ubiquitous

Brewsters I think, and leased to Strom for the accommodation of his guests. The Brewsters, in one way or another, staked the first claim on most parts of the Rockies, and members of that indomitable family crop up at Banff and Lake Louise and Jasper, and even as far west as Honolulu, running pack-trains, motor buses, hotels and dude ranches. They are friends of everyone, from princes up and down, and they were all very kind to me when I was out in the Rockies for the first time.

Sam found a spring somewhere and got a pail of water without having to melt down snow; we cooked bacon and beans and corn and soup and added some canned fruit salad to round it off; and at the end of it we rolled ourselves up in fine Hudson Bay blankets and slept heavily.

In the morning a steep climb through the forest and the ascent above timber-line over Brewster Pass lay ahead of us; and we had not got far beyond the crest and down into the burnt-over timber of the valley beyond, before it was time for lunch. We sat on a log, tramped a hole in the snow, built a fire, rigged up a support for a blackened pail we found safely cached on the branch of a dead tree, and before long we had tea.

The new valley was to me a Slough of Despond. Burnt timber bristled forlornly through the snow for miles, and ancient rock slides that had choked its trough from various quarters made a tiring series of climbs and short runs down that rendered the crossing towards the second and last pass a long and tiresome affair. This was the junction of Allenby and Bryant Creeks and a great hunting country, according to Strom later, who had an objective appreciation of such desolation; but it depressed me considerably, and I was glad when we stood on the threshold of what was in contrast to it, and indeed to any skier, a paradise beyond compare.

II

The form and dimensions of this paradise were not apparent to me at once. After almost two days on the trail human beings counted the most, together with warmth and

food and rum punches. Two people waited for us on top of the pass.

"Jesus Christ," I said fervently, and with no intention of blasphemy, when I met Strom. He had grown a beard since I had seen him first in Banff, and it gave him a divine or at least apostolic appearance.

His companion was a charming and dapper banker from Lethbridge I had met on the train west-bound. Now he looked like a genial tramp. I had a fellow feeling for him, as his mother, who was going through to the coast, had told me that she had to make him wear long woolly underwear, and that he often got his ears frozen in walking a few blocks to the office in the morning.

Such home truths recalled my own dear parents and the cascara tablets and long underwear they had given me; and though I never mentioned the matter to him, I felt I knew him better for it.

For years I have held out against warm underwear—now that the book has somehow swung round, like a debate on the Budget, to embracing it—largely perhaps because I have never lived in Lethbridge, where it hits forty below regularly. Even when I skied in the Rockies I resolutely stuck to my shorts. But between ourselves I was damn cold at eight and nine thousand feet; and I resorted to wearing my pyjama pants under my ski slacks. But all that by the way.

We were given oranges on top of the pass, which was in the Great Divide itself, if I am not mistaken, but not as formidable as the one we had negotiated before; our packs were taken away from us; and I skied down to the camp light-hearted and a little light-headed over the stimulus of new faces.

Two more—no, four more—appeared at camp. There was a husky American who had been a star all-round athlete in his day, which was not long past, and his attractive wife, a slim, brown-eyed wench who smoked a pipe and didn't lose one fraction of her femininity in doing so. Then there was another guide and a cook, both western, both efficient.

There was everything I craved in the way of comfort

and warmth. With a reviving and nourishing cup of rum punch inside, and a good dinner on top of it, I ceased to trouble over details.

Six or eight people can raise a pleasant hubbub between them in such circumstances; and later when we lay back in a deep settee beside the stove I was lulled and then held fascinated by the din and then by the peculiar nature of Strom's voice and personality.

The man himself had a magnetic quality that is common enough in men who are attractive and socially popular, but it is not often backed, as I believe it was in his case, with so much ability and horse-sense.

He is a Norwegian who has for some years been connected with the Lake Placid Club in the Adirondacks. He began to operate the little-used bungalow camp at Mount Assiniboine as a ski camp and then also as a climbing and riding camp in summer, at first in conjunction with the Marquis d'Albizzi.

The latter is known throughout the eastern states as one of the most curious, interesting and sophisticated personalities to be involved in such work. I would see him occasionally in Montreal, off to conduct a party on horseback a thousand miles or so down the backbone of the Rockies, or stocking up the chalet he had opened for an exclusive ski clientele in the Laurentians, near St. Saveur. He had the broadest smile, the whitest set of teeth, and the most extraordinary history of any man I have ever known. I never got it straight, but I believe he had skied with the Italian Army during the War, served with Russian Irregular cavalry, and been involved in many queer bits of history. If he could write an autobiography as disarmingly and entertainingly as he talked, it would make good reading.

But if d'Albizzi's accent, with a slow drawl and a Russian inflexion, was fascinating, Strom on that score had him beaten. Strom's was Scandinavian, though he had an excellent command of English, and to it was added an intriguing and infectious stutter. Moreover, he was a born raconteur. I am sure he realized the great theatrical value of his stutter and his accent, for they gave a touch all

their own to his yarns, and the funny ones became incredibly funny and the dramatic ones incredibly dramatic.

In a ski camp, of course, you talk ski shop. Nothing else seems very important. You talk a lingo as specialized as that of golf or fishing or photography; but as a subject it's more alive and interesting, because there's a little death and adventure thrown in; and in fact you come to think that there's no sport in the world quite so absorbing. You can chatter about equipment or technique, about racing or touring or jumping, you can tell of your own adventures, or you can tell the brave tales that do it honour as much as do other classics lend romance to the field of climbing and of Arctic exploration.

I would be very proud if this book could join the yet small nucleus of literature on ski-ing. Though I use ski-ing herein largely as a mode of travel and the thread for a narrative, I personally think it far more important, and am touched with a little of that fanaticism that must move a true disciple. There are books on technique, and chapters of great charm from the pens of writers like Smythe and Lunn and Moffatt, the American, but there are yet few other books that tell much of ski-ing and the joy of winter to the average human being. If this could do that, if . . . if . . .

But I shudder to think that I should allow the earnestness to creep in that's noticeable in the literature of climbing; and if any one school of thought were taken too seriously that is just what would happen.

The best skiers in the world can get pretty stilted when they extol their particular views. The Scandinavians are embarrassingly humourless about their blessed jumping; the English, God knows, can get stuffy over their downhill racing; the Americans in the east are apt to be so reverential of skill that the most childish conceits develop. My own Canadian countrymen share all these vices; but among them I like best the older crowd who can ski blindfold and in the dark without being able to do a regulation stem christy, and who say "Aw, nerts!" to the whole performance and go off and enjoy themselves over week-ends—like a

man will disappear into overalls and an old hat and go fishing.

Strom's magnetic conversation that evening ranged over the ancient days of ski history, and of ski-ing among the Finns and the Lapps, the Swedes and the Norwegians. It harked back to prehistoric times when some such means of sliding over the snow was known, and it embraced the strange tribal customs of the Laplanders. He had several pairs of big snow-boots about the place, Laplanders they were called, the size of overboots, as high as riding-boots, and as decorative, with their upturned pointed toes and touches of embroidery, as a pair of Indian moccasins. But they were much thicker, heavier, and stiffer than moccasins. They were of sealskin, as I remember, with the hair turned outwards, and they were thickly lined. They somehow gave something on which the tales of his country-side could fasten.

The Scandinavians, of course, are great lang-laufers, great cross-country travellers, and when you realize that the Olympic winners average eleven miles an hour, up hill, down and along the level, you know they can certainly cover the landscape. They introduced skis to North America, much to the amusement of the trappers and hunters who used the snow-shoes; and to this day a war is waged between the two modes of travel. Snow-shoes are undoubtedly best for working in thick underbrush; but the Finns who are great axe-men and are now among Canada's best lumberjacks, use skis constantly in the bush and the opposition to them is largely prejudice on the part of the old-timers.

The one place where they have made no impression is in the Canadian Arctic. There I understand the snow is too hard and gritty to make ski-ing easy; and the cold is too great to make ski-boots practicable for twenty-four-hour wear, as is often necessary. I once asked Major-General MacBrien, Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whether his men had tried them in the course of their duty in the north; and he replied that they had proved unsatisfactory. His own son, he said, who

has served as a constable in the north, had been among those to experiment but had found them wanting.

A member of the Oxford-Cambridge Arctic expedition who had wintered north of Spitsbergen gave me the same report of snow and climatic conditions there; and I think my friend Dick Finnie, who has wintered with the Eskimos and toured the Arctic, gave me a similar impression. But I can never understand it. The Lapps use skis for their reindeer herding under what must be Arctic conditions; and Amundsen made his dash to the South Pole ahead of Scott with their aid. . . . But no matter.

The Scandinavian skiers love to match their speed against that of the old-timers on snow-shoes, and to tell of their victories. Strom told of a race in Alaska where a man bet a hundred dollars he could cover a course in half the time a snow-shoer would take. He covered seventy-five miles in sixteen and a half hours; and the snow-shoer took two days.

Strom was one winter on a trip from Jasper down to the Columbia ice-fields. They called on a park ranger in a remote cabin far south of Jasper; and when they passed his place on the return journey he said he guessed he'd snow-shoe along with them as he was planning to head back to civilization.

They hinted he might not be able to keep up with them. He was insulted. They could go ahead, set their own pace. He'd keep up with them all right.

He remained in sight behind them for twenty minutes. He arrived in Jasper two days after they had left for the east.

During that expedition a return trip had to be made to retrieve some films cached at the head of Maligne Lake. Strom made the trip himself, expecting to take a couple of days; but he found the snow conditions on the flat surface of the lake to be perfect; and he covered the intervening thirty-two miles before lunch. To the amazement of his friends he was back before dark.

The yarns made my huffing and puffing over twenty odd miles of ski-ing seem rather silly; and I kept quiet.

Then, that evening or the next, there fell from his lips a tale that seemed so real to me that I remember it as part of Assiniboine itself; and as it is one of the little-known stories of ski-ing, I feel it should be set down here in a chapter of its own. It is the story of the second ascent of Mount McKinley.

Chapter Eight

MEN AGAINST MCKINLEY

I

FOR a writer I have a most unsatisfactory memory. Time and again I am faced by a situation when I think: I must remember every word of this, every inflexion, every detail: this is history, this is tremendous. But thus excited my mind folds up into a tight resisting mass, and only a few irrelevant pictures are left upon the surface of it.

At least that is so with phrases and dialogue, which makes me chary of quoting conversations unless I am very sure. But I do remember, selfishly and egotistically, the impressions that the event or the conversation I hear conjures up in my own mind, I remember the emotions invoked; and, however inadequate, my recollection of Strom's account of the climb of Mount McKinley is a jumble of irrelevant fragments I shall never forget.

Mount McKinley in Alaska is the highest peak on the North American continent, twenty thousand odd feet. In its altitude above sea-level it is not the highest in the world; but in magnitude, in the height of the summit from the base and surrounding terrain, it is one of the giants.

The greatest mountain in the world, the biggest, is probably adjacent Mount Logan that forms the corner-post between Alaska and Canada's Yukon. The latter towers head and shoulders up above the St. Elias range, which is in itself roughly equal to Switzerland in extent.

So McKinley is a giant in a land of giants, an inaccessible mountain not far on the map from the Arctic Circle, a challenge to every mountaineer. Its fascination, its drawing power, is difficult to explain to those who have

never climbed and who never want to climb. To attempt to reach its summit, to reach the summit of any high mountain, seems madness—and it is. Climbers try and explain away their fixation on an artistic or scientific or physical basis; but the truth is that they are just a little queer about mountains, and they climb them just for the fun of it.

If you've never done much on your own two feet you couldn't understand. But you don't need to. The business is too dramatic to need analysis. You know that men fling themselves against the heights, that some of them reach their objective, and some of them disappear, never to return. There's a world of mystery and adventure in that alone. What happens to them? What happens to the aeroplanes that head out to sea and are never seen again? There must be a special heaven set aside for souls with this kind of courage.

What happened to Irving and Mallory on Everest, to others like them on other peaks? It's nice to think of them plugging always onwards towards their goal, always young and fair as the snow and the cold will keep them, always fighting through the blizzard, just for fun.

When climbers disappear or are killed, it is, of course, tragic; but I don't think many of them would want to finish any other way. They belong to a breed that wants to die with its boots on, and death, if they are daring climbers, has been their companion so long that they are not likely afraid when it strikes for the last time. It's a tragic comedy, and I must confess I am always susceptible enough to be moved by it.

McKinley was first seen by Captain Cook in his explorations of the coast in the eighteenth century, first named forty years ago, first climbed in 1913 by a party led by Archdeacon Stuck. By a coincidence interesting to me I had met Belmore Browne who aided in the early attempts on the peak, and whose book gave inspiration and data sufficient for the second climb in which Strom was involved in 1932. The former is an artist who, to me, has led an almost ideal life. He has been able to live and

paint with his family in the heart of the mountains he loves so well; and his summers are spent trekking through them with his own pack-train.

Browne describes the mountain as "formed by a gigantic mass of granite forced upwards through the stratum of slate that overlaid it. On many of the lower peaks close to the mountain this stratum of slate is still in position, giving them a strange, black-capped appearance. The granite is of a light tan colour, and at a distance its grim cliffs take on a pinkish hue which gives the mountain a delicate atmospheric appearance that differentiates it from all others, and stamps it with a beauty and grandeur of its own."

He must have come to know it intimately for he took part in expeditions to it in 1906, '10 and '12. He shared over a hundred camps on the glaciers of the mountain with his friend Professor Parker. He went in summer and in winter with pack-horse and dog-sled: he and his companions, after failure and disappointment and many narrow escapes, deserved to win. But their victory fell short of the final summit by five minutes; the weather that last time defeated them twice. To their successors the next year went the technical victory.

The latter deserve great credit because their route was barred by a new hazard in the form of a ridge broken by a cataclysm a few days after the descent of Browne's party, and they had to cut their way through a maze of ice-blocks.

Browne's description of the earthquake provides an interesting background. Resting in their base camp on the Clearwater one evening Browne observed that . . . "the sky was a sickly green colour, and that the air seemed heavy and lifeless. . . . It reminded me of sinister skies that I had seen on the eastern sea-coast before heavy storms, and I turned to Aten and said, that if I were on a boat I would overhaul the ground tackle and see that everything was snug because it looked like 'dirty weather.'

"The words were scarcely out of my mouth before a deep rumbling came from the Alaskan Range. I can only compare the sound to thunder, but it had a deep hollow





quality that was unlike thunder, a sinister suggestion of overwhelming power that was terrifying. I remember as I looked the Alaskan Range melted into mist, and that the mountains were bellowing, that Aten was yelling something I could not understand, and that the valley above us had turned white.

"And then the earth began to heave and roll, and I forgot everything but the desire to stay upright. In front of me a boulder . . . turned, broke loose from the earth and moved several feet . . . then came the crash of our falling caches, followed by another muffled crash as the front of our hill slid into the creek, and a lake nearby boiled as if it were hot. The mossy surfaces on the hills were opening all around us, and the cracks filled with liquid mud.

"Then suddenly everything was still.

"We stood up, dazed, and looked about. The Alaskan Range was still wrapped in a haze of avalanche dust, and the country far and near was scarred, and stripped of vegetation where the earth had slid. Our dogs had fled at the beginning of the quake, and we could hear them whimpering and running about the willows. . . .

"While we were restoring order out of chaos an awe-inspiring sight met our eyes. Just east of Mount McKinley stood a magnificent 12,000-foot peak. It was somewhat like the Matterhorn in shape, and formed the culminating pinnacle in a range some six miles in length . . . and we saw that the whole extent of its western flank was avalanching.

"I have never seen a sight of such overpowering grandeur. The avalanche seemed to stretch along the range for a distance of several miles, like a huge wave; and like a huge wave it seemed to poise for an instant before it plunged downward on to the ice-fields thousands of feet below. The mountain was about ten miles away and we waited breathlessly until the terrific thunder of the falling mass boomed and rumbled among the mountains.

"Beyond the range that rimmed our valley a great white cloud began to rise. As it came into view and began to

obscure the range we could almost check off its growth as it billowed upward with startling rapidity—two—three—four thousand feet—until it hung like a huge opaque wall against the main range. And then it fell, the range that rimmed our valley was blotted out and the great wave of avalanche debris came rushing down our valley.

“We were already at work, strengthening our tent in frantic haste. We knew that the cloud was advancing at a rate close to sixty miles an hour and that we did not have much time to spare. With boulders to hold the bottom and tautened guy-ropes we made the tent as solid as possible and got inside before the cloud struck us. The tent held fast, but after the ‘wullies’ passed, the ground was spangled with ice-dust that only a few minutes before had formed the icy covering of a peak ten miles away . . .”

Remember this earthquake, and the avalanches. Their thunder makes a macabre accompaniment for the tale that follows, though they are not the villains of the piece. The greatest and most relentless enemy was the cold, the bitter cold of the latitude and the altitude, cold that made each achievement heroic, each risk the greater.

The history of the district is brightened by an ancient controversy over a claim made by a doctor, who subsequently discovered the North Pole—to his own satisfaction—that he had climbed Mount McKinley. The resourceful doctor had been on the 1906 Expedition, but had remained behind with one other, and claimed to have made the climb in circumstances that his former companions knew to be physically impossible. The Expedition 1910 did some amusing detective work and were able to duplicate fake photographs taken by the famous doctor, and prove him unquestionably to be wrong.

Another climb over which some argument continues was made in 1910 by four “sourdoughs”—old-timers—one of whom had the delightful name of McGonigle, who carried a flag-pole with them and are supposed to have set it up on the North Peak. It was not found by Strom’s friends.

But stranger things have happened. I remember a yarn

told at the annual camp of the Canadian Alpine Club at Roger's Pass in '29, of the "first ascent" of Mount Sir Donald nearby. The climbers rejoiced over their victory until one of them happened to lean back and place his hand for support in a shallow pool of water. It fell on a railway spike.

Years later he told of the incident in a lecture, and a man present said he had been one of a party of railway workers who had made the climb one Sunday during the construction of the railway over Roger's Pass.

II

Strom's story began with his first sight of McKinley on a visit to Alaska, and of his description of it to his friend Alfred Lindley, a Minneapolis lawyer, who had been with him ski-ing two seasons at Assiniboine and once on a visit to the Columbia ice-fields. Lindley sounded like a good fellow to me, and from his accounts of the trip I read subsequently in alpine journals the impression is strengthened. Certainly he was enterprising, for he visited Alaska himself to investigate, and took a plane to fly around the mountain to have a proper look at it.

The idea was that, though their experience of high-alpine climbing was relatively limited or conventional, their knowledge of ski-ing was considerable; and that skis should be a great aid in attempting that particular ascent. They were. They facilitated the downhill parts of relaying of equipment, and speeded reconnaissance work; and I am surprised that ski-journals have not taken greater note, for, as the first ascent of North America's great mountain in which skis were used, it is of historic significance.

There are quaint jealousies among older and more conservative climbers against admitting ski-ing into the sacred precincts, and there have been schisms comparable to the divisions of religions over details of dogma and over arguments as to the number of angels that could be balanced on the point of a needle. Skis from a purely mountaineering viewpoint have made much possible. They have shortened the time interval in descending retreats over snows and

glaciers; they have provided safer means of crossing dangerous snow-bridges; they have made climbing a year-round sport and added hundreds of exciting winter ascents and first ascents to the annals of the sport; they have given it new life and new blood.

Strom went on to tell of the co-operation of the Alaska Park authorities, of the preparations for the climb, and of the addition of the park superintendent, Harry Leik, and an experienced ranger, Grant Pearson, to the party.

The latter stood out as a personality from the narrative. He seemed to be a sort of Donald Duck to the outfit: swearing, humorous, plucky to the last and taking the most terrific punishment as a matter of course.

He fell on the summit, slid down five hundred feet over the glazed slanting surface of the mountain, and was just saved by loose snow from continuing on into eternity. He wounded his arm with his ice-axe, lost his mitts, his hands were badly frost-bitten, his nose was smashed, and his face lacerated.

But later Lindley's account mentions Pearson, philosophically remarking that they had had no hardships yet, for had they not always had enough to eat and a sleeping-bag at night. He had never done such climbing before, but he took it all in his stride. Towards the end, at a time of great strain and anxiety, he slipped and fell into a crevasse and was hauled out with difficulty. He suffered most of the hard luck, and seemed to have grit enough for the lot of them. He had "guts," though there must have been a lot of them current in the neighbourhood at that time.

Starting on April 1st they packed in about two thousand pounds of equipment by dog-sled from a point on the Alaska railroad one hundred miles to their base camp on the Clearwater, within a few yards of the camp site used by Browne and from which he had watched the earthquake. Three-fifths of the load was their own, two-fifths represented cosmic ray apparatus being taken in to be cached at the head of the Muldrow Glacier, part way up the mountain. This latter equipment was for another expedition, whose leader, Carpé, had been invited previously

to join their party, which was to combine scientific observations with mountaineering. Cosmic rays are something I can no more comprehend than the rotation of the galaxy; but they are emanations supposed to be more frequent at that altitude and at that proximity to the earth's magnetic pole than elsewhere; though what that proves I know not.

Part of this other party was being brought in by aeroplane; and Strom's had the queer experience later of looking down from 15,000 feet upon an aeroplane buzzing above the surface of a glacier at about 6000 feet, and seeming to be an angry red hornet crawling up on the very surface of the snow itself. It was then dropping supplies to two men, Carpe and Koven, who had already been landed, and who had set up camp on the glacier, preparatory to relaying supplies to a higher camp.

Little pictures suggested by his story stand out clearly in my mind, and the sight and sound of this aeroplane is one of them.

Another was the moment when the old thermometer was found. This recorded the maximum and minimum temperatures reached during the last nineteen years since the instrument had been left there by Stuck's party. It was in a wooden case wedged between two rocks kept clear by the wind. The minimum needle had sunk into the bulb, past the 95 degree below zero (Fahrenheit) mark on the scale. It must have fallen to a hundred degrees or more at that point, 15,000 feet in altitude. The instrument was later tested and found to function accurately.

But to achieve McKinley they had to work their dog-teams up over the Muldrow Glacier, a dangerous adventure. There were many hidden traps, and the dogs or the sled or the men were constantly breaking through the snow and hanging suspended over crevasses in the ice that may have been hundreds of feet deep. A few of these were visible and could be detoured, but for the most part the route had to be marked by upright willow-wands so it could be followed on the return. To forget, to lose the

way back over this treacherous area, would mean almost certain death.

When on the return over this part, blinded by driving snow, exhausted by forty hours of tramping under sixty-pound packs with no sleep, Strom put out his hand in the grey murk and felt one of these slender willow-wands, the gesture seemed miraculous. Almost by instinct he had picked up the thread that would lead them through the deadly labyrinth; and it probably saved the lives of the party. But life and death depend on so many small elements at such times that only unfaltering courage, an experienced wisdom, and a great store of good luck can bring men through. There was luck abroad on McKinley that week. Good luck and bad: theirs was the good.

They cached the cosmic ray recording equipment, where it was found safely soon after by Carpe and his friend Koven, sent back the dog-teams, and continued on up their mountain. From here everything had to be back-packed, and the narrative becomes bewildering to the layman in the maze of Camp I-Camp II, in the strange geography of the mountain, and in the uncertainty of unfamiliar alpine phrases.

Skis that had helped much in traversing the dangerous glacier, speeded the relay of supplies from one camp to another. The party had to consolidate itself stage by stage, like an army advancing into an enemy country, always having food and shelter with them to tide over days of storm, always having a known line of retreat and extra supplies to fall back on. They would tramp slowly up, but, on their skis, they would go like hell on the return relay. Skis helped in reconnaissance, and after an hour or more in winning a ridge or col from which they could observe the lay of the land ahead, they would return to camp in a minute. Ski-ing is like that.

But skis after a point became useless. The snow was too hard and bumpy. They changed to oversized Alaskan moccasins, with many layers of socks, in-soles and felt slippers within, and iron crampons, which are long-pronged creepers giving a foothold on hard snow or rough

ice. They had to cut steps, thousands of steps, some in the hard snow of the lower portion, some in the ice; and when the time came to return, weakened and close to exhaustion, there was the heartbreak of finding them obliterated by fresh wind-blown snow.

They worked up, inch by inch almost, in altitude, and established themselves between the twin peaks of McKinley. Packing as much as sixty pounds at that height was slow work, and the intense cold seemed to parch and further rarefy the air. It was twenty-five and thirty degrees below zero Fahrenheit most of the time, which at fifteen or twenty thousand feet is bitter cold indeed.

It was exhausting to climb, tiring to do the simplest things in camp. To turn over in their sleeping-bags sent their hearts pounding and gave them a sense of suffocation. " 'Pass me a knife,' the man beside you would say," Strom told us, "and you'd think: Damn you, you . . . ! And you'd reach slowly out for it and hand it to him as if it weighed pounds."

The climax did not come when they ascended the South Peak, struggling unsuccessfully to take photographs and got badly frost-bitten hands in doing so, for it was over thirty below and a wind was blasting over the summit. Nor yet when plucky Pearson slipped and went plunging to what seemed, as they watched helpless, to be sure death. They did not use a rope for climbing the ridges to the peaks, for it would have hopelessly delayed the relaying of supplies: it was every man for himself.

Nor yet was the moment of triumph when they stood upon the top of the slightly lower North Peak. Perhaps to their story there is no fine climax, for the whole episode was too intense to allow for many peaks of excitement. Perhaps it is the knowledge of alarums without, of menacing thunder on the left, lingering on perhaps from the earthquake of twenty years before, that makes it impossible to provide a dramatic curtain to the climb. Realities seldom arrange themselves in good theatrical sequence.

III

After a night's rest in the camp between the two peaks the party set out on the gruelling return journey in weather well below zero and in the teeth of a merciless gale. They made good progress during the day and decided to push on during the night without stopping. They knew the route and worked their way through the dim light, shovelling new steps where they found the old ones buried, and reaching Muldrow Glacier at dawn.

There they found the tents of the two climbers who had been dropped by plane to take observations with the cosmic ray apparatus and who were awaiting the rest of their party to join them from below. One of these men was Allen Carpé, thirty-seven, one of the most experienced and ablest of American climbers, perhaps the best, and Theodore Kovan, twenty-eight, of Jersey City.

The tents had been occupied, but were now deserted. Two days' snow-fall had accumulated. Strom had snaps and they seemed pathetic and lonely in the midst of the white waste of the glacier. The little camp, and the cosmic ray apparatus that was ticking mysteriously, was in good order. The diaries of the two men showed that they had been expecting their friends and had become anxious over their non-appearance. The last entry was two days before.

Worried over the whereabouts of the men, Strom's party continued down. After they had gone about a mile and a half over the glacier, and had descended about a thousand feet, they came upon the body of a man frozen in the snow. Lindley knew Carpé personally, and when they turned the figure over they knew it must be Kovan. He had been injured, had started to struggle back towards camp, and had perished.

Nearby was a hole in the snow showing where the snow over a crevasse had given way. There were marks of skis side-stepping beside it, and a confusion of tracks that would indicate they had both fallen in, perhaps one in trying to rescue the other. The snow was too treacherous

to permit them to examine the place closely, and they lacked the numbers and the strength and the ropes to allow for any risks being taken at that stage.

They called, but there was no sound in reply. The accident must have happened over forty-eight hours before.

They tried to move Koven's body on a sledge, but gave up after a time. The snow-bridges were too dangerous. Pearson had abandoned skis and, like a proper sourdough, resorted to his beloved snow-shoes; but he fell through despite them, and was wedged by his pack after he had fallen forty feet into a crevasse. He was recovered with difficulty; and soon Koven's body was wrapped in a tent and cached beside the upright sledge.

They had been driving on under sixty-pound packs for over thirty hours, remember, and this new turn to affairs threatened them with a like fate.

They went on, that afternoon and through the night, and because he could sometimes feel the hardness of their old track through the newly fallen blanket of snow, and because his instincts were good and luck was with them, Strom put out his hand and found the first of the willow-wands. And so in storm and darkness they continued along the treacherous labyrinth over which they had so painstakingly picked their way a few days before.

At three in the morning they came upon the tent of the men whose arrival *Carpé* and Koven had awaited. There they found one man ill and another nursing him. A third had been sent back to find a non-existent telephone and to have an aeroplane sent in to help them, and was apparently lost.

They broke the news to them about their friends; but there was nothing more that could be done. They undertook to have a plane sent in when they reached Fairbanks. Then they skied on to their base camp, which they reached a couple of hours later.

Strom's yarn ended there. They were safe . . . they only had another hundred miles of ordinary ski-ing ahead of them.

IV

And so the account of the second ascent of Mount McKinley is overshadowed by another tragic story. It would perhaps not be kind to set it out at great length here, though there has been much written about it in various journals; and not wise to speculate about it without being more intimately acquainted with the many facts.

There are so many ifs; and one of them of course is the fact that if an aeroplane had not been used, the accident might not have happened. It was because the two skiers, Carpe and Koven, had not become familiar with the dangerous detail of the glacier below them through having to achieve a route up it themselves, that they were trapped.

And yet, for all that, the aeroplanes brought out another bit of matter-of-fact courage that warms the heart. The pilots battled with danger and death as much as the climbers. The first machine landed on the upper glacier and dropped its passengers and their supplies. It was a risky business. The skis of the plane might sink deep in the snow or be caught and cause it to crash. The very snow might give way and reveal a crevasse. Landing and taking off at that altitude with lighter air had to be done at a hundred miles an hour. The first take-off attempt was a failure, and the pilot philosophically left his machine stranded, after folding back the wings single-handed so it wouldn't be damaged by the driving wind, and tramped back on his snow-shoes to get the help of his passengers to start up again. Mountains rose on every hand ten and fifteen thousand feet higher, winds and air currents were treacherous, clouds materialized in a few minutes, snow would fill the air. They rocked the machine so the skis broke loose from the snow, where they were frozen, and the pilot and one of the trio took off safely. Carpe and Koven remained.

"We don't often have a job like that to do," remarked the pilot when it was all over.

Subsequently, on the lower glacier a plane aided in

transport and rescue work, twice axles were broken and the machine stranded. It all had to be done at a season when the spring break up was hitting the rivers about Fairbanks, and skis were useless. They seemed to be able to switch their machines from pontoons to skis and to wheels in short order. They would have to take off from snowless regions and land on glaciers where broad skis were the only means of support. They managed it by the fire department hosing the air-field at Fairbanks and making it so muddy that the skis would slither across it. They must have worked like beavers.

If McKinley belongs in the annals of ski-ing this other business is an honour to flying. But in Alaska and Northern Canada aeroplanes have been doing the most fantastically dangerous things for years, and getting away with it. It's been all in the day's work, and never for fame. There are some grand yarns to be told.

The end to this secondary story is, I think, in the diaries of the two men who died. Photographs they had taken were found and developed, and together with their notes they give an interesting impression of their last days. They did not live, as did Scott, with any premonition of death; and their memoranda is a human jumble of scientific data and homely detail.

Carpé, who wrote a delightful account of his climb of Mount Logan in 1925 that was published after his death, stuck pretty much to record of cosmic ray readings. His last note mentioned a . . . "soup made of chicken and thickened with oatmeal and bullion cubes . . ."

Koven's was fuller. Five days before his death he wrote: "Had the finest ski run of my life back to camp, a continuous 25-minute slide through powder snow, interrupted by two sitzmarks in the least excusable places . . ."

He draws a picture of their little tent at four-thirty the next morning . . . "Awoke very early as it began to blow badly. A. had to get up and prop the cosmic ray tent as it was sagging. From then it kept getting worse by the minute. Soon we had to take both poles down. It seemed as though every moment everything would go roaring

down the glacier. Then there would be brief intervals of calm, and we could hear the wind pounding over the ridges like a locomotive blowing steam. We lay in our sleeping-bags and held down the tent."

And the next day: "The wind had cut the snow away from everything hard. Ski-tracks were elevated several inches in the air. I wonder where the others are? Percy and Spad?"

And the next: "Skied down a ways to look for the boys but they were not yet past the ice fall." The last entry still speculated: "No sign of P & S. yet."

In full his diary gave a nice glimpse of the man. He mentions being shown the mysteries of making cosmic ray readings by his friend, and of the temperature recorded by "Max and Minnie."

But I like that line: "Had the finest ski run of my life." They must have been happy there.

Perhaps the epitaph for the two should be: "We've just . . . skied down a ways to look for the boys. . . ."

Chapter Nine

THE VASTNESS OF IT ALL

I

MOUNT ASSINIBOINE and everything that pertains to it seemed suspiciously like a set-up. Take Erling Strom himself. He was an improbably efficient and experienced host to find available in a remote place.

Take the camp he operated. It might have been designed by a sentimental landscape artist who wanted little log buildings sprinkled just-so, to give foreground to his composition. There was the main cabin with a veranda facing the view, and row of tiny satellite cabins spaced out along the crest of the hill. Everything trigly and snugly made of logs, solidly and by good craftsmen.

The only thing that was exposed was the plumbing, and I got so accustomed to it that I feared for my habits on returning to civilization. There was an "Engaged-Vacant" sign on the trail out the back door, and if it said "Vacant" you went ahead and turned it about before you continued round the corner, so that it read "Engaged" to the next-comer.

The furniture in the main cabin was fashioned of peeled logs, the beds in the smaller cabins were of logs. As I say, it was all too too picturesque.

Then the view. I must confess that this was an item saved up for the very moment of my departure. Mount Assiniboine at the head of the white waste that was Lake Magog brooded like an unseen presence during the days I was there. Then the morning I left the sky was clear for a time, and it stood out, sharp and clear and ridiculously romantic.

It was like the Matterhorn all right, but there was little competition from its neighbours. A terrific amphitheatre encircled the lake upon three sides, a sweep of snow and glacier rose from the middle, and the dramatic pyramid of Assiniboine crowned the whole. It was immense, classic, scarcely plausible.

Assiniboine is one of those mountains you can't sight without feeling excited. Practically twelve thousand feet in altitude and of distinctive shape, it's the most striking thing on the Rocky Mountain horizon for many miles. At Sunshine, Skoki and elsewhere it was the boast that, from such and such a point on a clear day, "You could see Assiniboine."

It's not a terribly difficult mountain to climb. Though remote from the railway it has become popular enough to attract a permanent camp of the Alpine Club of Canada, and a more elaborate affair now operated by Strom. But for all, it has not lost its sense of feeling of austerity, and divinity. You can't help but worship it a little.

The camp stood on a slight rise near the bottom on the saucer dominated by the Assiniboine group. It was the focal point for many fine ski-runs, eleven at least, beginning two or three thousand feet higher and ending at the very door of the camp. This was very convenient as it enabled one to return to luncheon, or to make the last leg of an all-day expedition in short order. There is always something exciting in the realization that a journey up that has taken you two hours or three hours you can complete on the return in three or four minutes, perhaps less.

The time I was there, and the overcast weather conditions, did not permit of many expeditions far afield; but one morning we climbed near the crest of Goat, the back of a mighty mountain of another name whose cliffs tower vastly above the Bryant Creek valley through which I had passed; again we were on the slope of Terrapin Glacier in a tributary cirque to the left of Assiniboine, and again up into a saddle by Wedgewood, which is a mountain to the right of the central group.

But it is pointless to become explicitly geographical.

These might be mountains in the moon so far as most readers are concerned, and it is enough to know that they were there, and that I was there, rather frightened.

That feeling of alarm that makes life so interesting for me returned in full force several times at Assiniboine. Sometimes our trek would lead us up slopes so steep that kick turns could only be made conveniently away from the slope, and my innards would congeal into a quivering jelly as I was forced to swing my ski out over what seemed to me to be eternity.

A kick turn, for the uninitiate, is the way you switch-back up a slope in a series of zigzag traverses. You have to stand on one leg and brandish the other leg bravely in front of you, complete with ski. You must then swing it round so it points backwards and falls neatly parallel to your anchored ski; and then you stand in a lobster-like spread-eagled position from which you think desperately you can never recover without breaking something. You stand there helpless, leaning into the slope on your two ski-poles, and you sweat.

. . . If I slip, oh, dear God, if I slip, I am slipping . . . oh, dear, *dear* God. . . .

But perhaps you don't slip. Your weight is gingerly shifted on to the reversed ski, you wave the other ski about so it falls into line beside its fellow, and you look as relieved and as pleased as a hen that's laid an egg.

You get pretty good at kick-turning after a bit, and do it as unthinkingly and as expeditiously as you'd right-about turn at the march in the army, but the initiation on a very steep slope is a bit nerve-breaking. The turn is to be used uphill, never downhill. It just isn't done downhill. It just isn't Aryan. If you're caught and cornered, wait until there is no one to witness your shame, and then plank your skis about and continue your descent.

Here, by easy stages, and over an all too brief period, my experience with deep snow and high alpine ski-ing, begun at Skoki, was continued. My legs and more particularly the muscles used for downhill running were strengthened, my nerves were a little better and I became

more accustomed, or reconciled, to heights. The mental hazard in ski-ing in such country is not really as great as I pretend, never anything to be a real deterrent. Once you can ski reliably in any type of snow you need never worry. Look at the slopes immediately ahead—and to hell with the thought that those people two thousand feet below look like black lice on a white blanket. But at this point it may likewise be pointless to be explicitly technical.

Assiniboine produced several varieties of ski-ing, and, in the midst of such titanic surroundings, we managed to have great fun one afternoon in a little gully that dropped a couple of hundred feet in a hill back of the camp. The weather and visibility on the open treeless slopes were bad, there was snow in the air; and it was much easier and more pleasant to play, as it were, in our own backyard.

So “tests” were staged, good homespun tests such as the Ski Club of Great Britain and like organizations with complex rules and regulations never heard of. The thing was to run the gully in various ways. The most difficult route bounced back and forth from one wall to the other, turning over shoulders, plunging down and rearing up again, diving between trees, and swinging down in a small *schuss* that gave it a fine final flourish. If you could run it without poles it was quite a thing, and I was heady because, after once being smacked breathlessly flat on my stomach into the opposing bank, I was able to manage it.

Messing about like this, to revert momentarily to technique, is excellent practice in making one nippy on one's feet and quick to regain balance over all types of terrain. Ski-ing is not running straight on powder snow, or swinging prettily about in a series of linked turns on a gentle slope; it's taking everything that comes, and liking it.

Strom had other tests, and one of them was to circuit the lake in so many minutes, which meant largely, sturdy *lang-laufing*; and the climax of the lot was to *schuss* the glacier from the foot of Assiniboine to the Lake, a feat that had only been accomplished once, I understand. They





were good psychology, these tests: they gave people something to do and work for, and they made them better skiers.

II

Departure from Assiniboine was made easier because some of it came with me. Strom and the two nice Americans remained behind; the husband recovering from a sprained ankle; and my banker friend, a cheery guide named Bagguley, and Sam Evans came along. It is a sorry business uprooting oneself from pleasant surroundings, a process I have had to do many times since; but with three such companions on the trail and lighter packs the return seemed easier.

As though a curtain had been drawn aside from the classic landscape before the camp, Assiniboine and its satellites was revealed in its entirety in the early morning. The sun crept across the valley and threw long fingers of light into the greyness of the lingering dawn, and every detail stood out sharp and clear. A wind was blowing from the west, and a plume of cloud took form to leeward of the peak and gave it an impression of size and majesty it might have otherwise lacked. Then the clouds closed down again, and as I looked back at the camp, half-hidden in the deep snows that left only the outline of the roofs showing, the mountains beyond were revealed only as ghostly parts of what I knew now to be a stupendous whole.

Among the little crosses I had to bear on the trek from Assiniboine was back-slip. When your skis in climbing don't bite into the snow enough to prevent you from slipping, you suffer from back-slip; and you develop the persecution complex.

The skiers ahead have set a fairly steep line up the slope, because their skis are properly waxed, and you try and follow. Their broken track offers the line of least resistance, and you think you should use it. But you might be wearing roller skates under such circumstances, and for every two feet forward you slip back one. You strain your arms upon your poles; you cease to be patient or rational

enough to strike out a new and gentler gradient for yourself; and you develop the little-boy-being-left-behind feeling.

The solution for long climbs in high mountains is, of course, to use skins of sealskin or plush to which I have already referred; or to use proper wax. The latter, for climbing, is an essentially Scandinavian development, as in the rolling terrain of that peninsula, and indeed in any cross-country touring, it is bothersome to stop for every climb and adjust skins. The ideal is to apply some substance to the running surface of the skis that will run smoothly forward but not slip back.

This has been achieved by various waxes that have not necessarily any "grain" in that they will slide forward but not backward: that would be asking too much. What they do is to have a tacky quality that attracts snow if tramped on, but that shed snow once they are moving forward. Thus, with the proper wax, you are able to tramp diagonally up a slope, being careful not to try the providence of your wax too much, and when you reach the crest of the hill you give your skis a downward and forward kick, scuff the clogging snow from beneath them, and thenceforth they will run smoothly downhill or along the flat. It all has something to do with the physical factors of "stiction" and friction.

That is the ideal, but for alpine conditions it is difficult to wax properly or adequately for long climbs. You climb over slopes exposed to the sun and slopes in shadow, you climb from where it is mild into altitudes where it is cold as the devil; and the quality of the snow varies as you go. Each snow, for climbing, demands a different wax; what's good for one quality of snow is bad for another. So you need a universal wax, and there's no such nostrum.

All this refers to waxing for climbing and touring. Waxing your skis for jumping, and more particularly for downhill running, is entirely another matter. There the aim is to wax, or grease, as some people call it, so that you'll slither with a minimum of resistance over all

qualities of snow, so that your wax won't wear off until the course is finished, and so you won't be tripped up on striking patches of sticky snow.

The whole business is an art—a black art—and waxes are brewed in the dark recesses of the Scandinavian soul, distilled in the remote haunts of the Swiss, and applied with ritualistic zeal by the hierarchy of the Tyrol.

Men win races by waxing their skis so that one wax wears off just in time to reveal a second wax for a snow that's lower down, or by waxing one ski for one snow and the other for another, and ski-ing pretty much on one leg or the other according to the nature of the slopes. Sometimes they stroke a rabbit's foot over the waxed surfaces, and that probably does the most good.

All this is between you and me; and were waxing experts who pridefully produce these horrentous materials to overhear me, I would be sent to Coventry. But for all that, there's a lot to it. You should treat and wax your skis to protect them from wear and from undue damage from rocks; and for touring you simply have got to have something that will prevent your skis from balling-up, and that will not wear off in five minutes. Proper waxing can make the difference between heaven and hell. Without it can be like tramping with weights on your feet, whereas your skis should be as were wings to Hermes.

Be all this digression as it may, it was born of experience in climbing the south slopes of Brewster Pass so bitter that I shall never forget. I had a couple of thousand feet ahead of me, and I thought myself in purgatory.

I stopped and miserably tried to apply some wax, the wrong wax; and it made matters worse. To wax your skis when the wax itself is cold and hard and won't adhere, and when your skis are hard and icy, is a futile gesture. I tried spitting on my skis and waiting for the spittle to freeze and pick up snow. But I could not produce enough saliva (I use 14' 6" of ski), and it seemed to do no good.

Then the banker man dropped behind, undid his rucksack and found some wax, the right wax.

As I followed gratefully after, slipping no longer, I

noticed that an aura, as of a halo, surrounded the queer beret he had pulled over his ears. And when his cheerful freckled face comes back to me now, it is glorified by a blaze of light.

As a result of the minor hell of climbing, I was exceedingly receptive to the details of the pass, and can remember every fold in the landscape, and every stone in the little markers piled for the guidance of climbers and pack-trains in summer. "Stone men" these rough guide-posts are called, and you will see them in the high places the world over.

Then the trail dropped down a narrow gully, through which we slipped singly, hoping neither slope would avalanche; and soon we were dropping through magnificent first-growth timber towards Brewster Cabin.

Like finding some castle or park surviving unspoilt from modern encroachments in the old world, the great stands of timber that have been spared from fire or the axe of the lumberman for centuries give one an impression of the past, a small souvenir of a period gone beyond recall thanks largely to the carelessness of man. Here the trunks of the trees were broad and seemed to rise for a hundred feet or more, and they marched up the steep mountain-side in extended order, having little undergrowth at their feet, and throwing a cathedral pattern against the sky with their shafts and branches.

The zigzag down-trail provided interesting ski-ing; and I tried with varying success a series of jump-turns. These are dramatic and gratifying, when they come off; but to be accomplished with a pack is tiring; and I would have done better to use the stick-turn favoured by Sam Evans to thrust himself about in the smallest possible space with a minimum of effort.

When the trail, the next day, had dropped to a lower altitude and to a different strata of climate near Banff, there was a tricky breakable crust on the snow. It was likely to catch one's skis and throw one. Turning was rather difficult in a confined space, and luck alone prevented us from breaking our necks.

At this point, curiously enough, moose tracks presented an unusual hazard. A moose, and there were many about, wades slowly through the snow and leaves a track behind him like that of a man without snow-shoes. There are a series of staggered holes, and when the snow hardens, and each hole is coated with a crust through which the tip of your skis breaks and perhaps buries itself, it is irritating. And when you come upon a place where a moose has slept on the trail, it is a *coup de grace*.

Moose seem to like ski-trails and wade up and down them so that in places they are rutted deep. But best of all do they like to slump down upon them and sleep. The result is a depression, a "grave," as large as if made by a baby elephant. And when that is nicely hardened and glazed by crust, it makes a perfect trap.

Sam mumbled something about someone once running full tilt into a moose actually asleep on the trail; and I proceeded with still more caution.

The nature lover in me was given other items on which to chew by Ptarmigan. I have always thought Ptarmigan were werewolves, or something big and dangerous; just as Cassowaries, as a result of that damn limerick, have always been cannibals with a taste for religious literature. But nearing Brewster Cabin in the mid-afternoon, I found they were nothing more or less than large white pigeons or grouse.

I was surprised, being jaded and unobservant after the last stage down through the timber, to suddenly have the snow burst into pieces at my feet and fly away. It proved that these birds had dug themselves in like partridge, just below the surface, and were only sufficiently startled to move when I was directly upon them. They moved a few yards away and settled down. They were very tame because they saw very few human beings; and I had a good look at them. Of course, all there was to look at was a pair of eyes and a beak; all the rest, being white and the snow being white, was invisible.

The first bird of the species I had seen at Skoki. He was pointed out to me. See? There! Just five yards in

front of you! I could see nothing. It was like staring for a droning aeroplane in a cloudless sky and seeing nothing. Then the specks that were its eyes and its beak stood out, and they seemed to be darting back and forth. Approaching a little closer I saw the bird shifting itself from side to side in the snow, and gradually working its way down. It was near an out-cropping of stray wisps of wind-blown grass; and it was either trying to dig its way down to the dead grass beneath, or attempting to dig out a shelter for itself. I never found out because I came too close, and it flew away a few yards and vanished.

III

Banff, when it swallowed us up, and broke the threads that linked me with my companions from Assiniboine, seemed like home. I spent the day wandering about, writing letters, arranging about having photographs developed, having a basket or ring on one ski-pole repaired, and arranging about making a visit to Sunshine the following day.

Sunshine cabin lay south-east of Banff, but off in a slightly different direction than Assiniboine, and much closer to the town. With the first gap covered by sleigh, nine miles of climbing on skis can do the trick. It was said to be on the brink of a fine ski terrain, though not operated as regularly as a ski camp as Skoki or Assiniboine, and I was anxious to see it.

It involved back-tracking in my mind to '29 when I had taken a Trail Ride from Sundance Canyon to Sunshine Cabin, Simpson Summit, the Egypt Lakes, Mount Bell, and Storm Mountain Bungalow Camp. Those names need mean nothing to you other than pick out little-known points on a detour from the Bow Valley south and parallel to the valley, and then back into the valley again at a point farther west. When I covered the trail up to the cabin I found I could recognize little; only the general lay of the land about the pass, the shape of the cabin, and a little gully by a stream half-way where we had stopped to have a snack and rest the horses. It is always foolish to expect to recapture much

from one's memory, particularly when there's snow on the ground. Sunshine produced little sunshine. So little, in fact, and so much snow, that a day there was spent indoors, and my glimpse of the district came on the very moment of my departure. But Sunshine, to add homely and personal details, proved that I could cook; and I took charge of my guide, Chess, brother of Skoki's Rupe Edwards, and fed him until he politely begged for mercy. Of course it all came from cans, except the bacon; and I made soup, and beans and stewed tomatoes and sundry dishes I have forgotten, all from cans, and I was convinced I made a fine camp cook. It was a pleasant illusion with only one other person to suffer for it.

Little else marked my stay in the cabin, which was much like that at Brewster Creek, except that I suddenly began to talk in my sleep.

Apparently in the middle of the night I remarked in loud and cheerful tones from the upper bunk: "Come along, old timer, it's quite O.K." Nothing very incriminating in that, except that it may have indicated I was then ski-ing in the east with a friend who usually came under violent protest.

We would go up into the Laurentians from Montreal, he and I, and fate would set out to make the day as unpleasant as possible. It would rain, or the snow would be glazed with an icy crust, or we'd meet up with an acquaintance who'd lead us off on a new trail he had found and that would turn out to be eighteen miles in length.

". . . d you, Meredith," he'd swear from close behind, ". . . d . . . you."

And then in that hearty manner of the man who has let his friend in for more than he had bargained, I'd tell him to cheer up and come along, and that it was quite all right. It is a wonder that friendship survived it.

However, he was avenged upon me in the Rockies, vicariously, for I was racked and ruined by the two hundred of miles of mountain trails I had to cover, and was given a taste of the lame-duck complex.

The day we would have to leave dawned overcast; but

there was some hope of improvement; and after packing our rucksacks and leaving them ready to pick up, we headed up the hill towards a height that would give us a view of the pass. It was from here, on a clear day, Assiniboine shoved its wedge up into the lofty vista of a trough in the mountains, and from where rolling shapes relatively unbroken by menacing precipices were revealed.

For a time the air cleared enough to show some of the fine country roundabout, and enough to make me wish for more time and better weather to explore it; but we had to go.

I glanced at my watch and saw we had taken almost an hour to climb up from the cabin that I could see hiding minutely in the snow far below. Chess turned his skis downhill and was gone. I saw him swing over the crest, saw a plume of snow-like spray from a speed-boat rise behind him, and then drop out of sight. There was a long pause until he reappeared on the lower slope, shooting across the flat towards the cabin. He turned when he got there and looked back. My teeth were chattering and my heart bumping, but there was only one thing to do.

I put my skis into his tracks and pushed off. The speed gathered in no time, and I veered off into fresh snow so that it would check my speed a little. Where he had dropped over the crest and out of sight, I found it was not as steep as I thought. Once I was going, once my skis began to float high in the snow as they gathered speed and seemed willing to go where I wanted, I gained confidence. I soared down through the snow, taking it straighter and steeper than I thought possible.

But it became faster than I liked. To turn was a strain that made my legs almost cry aloud. My knees began to knock, the limbs to tremble. Could I hold up? I wanted desperately to fall and relieve the tension. My heart was in my mouth over the last dip.

Somehow, though the snow piled high against my feet and nearly threw me forward, I held up at the bottom; but when momentum had carried me back to the cabin and I paused beside Chess, who was picking up his rucksack, I

nearly collapsed. It was one of my first long downhill runs in deep snow; it was glorious, but I discovered how much stronger I had to be.

The return journey took us down through a little canyon of spectacular beauty, and down the bed of a mountain torrent, frozen, naturally, at that season, where we had to dodge great tussocks of snow that hid the boulders.

The momentum of the return carried me, as it were, clear on to a train at Banff, and I did not realize that I was leaving the Rockies, and all the happiness they had given me, until the time came for me to take my seat in the diner and begin once more the routine of the transcontinental journey.

I was heading east once more, with so much unfinished business. That last ecstatic run down to the cabin at Sunshine was a fitting close to my little tour in the west; but it showed me that there yet remained a great many things I had to do.

Chapter Ten

WESTERN BACKGROUND

I

UNFINISHED business includes certain subjects about which the reader may not care two hoots. For all the chapters that have gone before I have given relatively little information about ski-ing conditions and terrain and technique; I have compared the mountains with nothing that may be known to the average ski-minded reader, like the Alps; and I have completely ignored such serious matters as the geographical and historical background of the Rockies. Such data can bring a glaze over the eye of the reader who seeks entertainment, and he'll skip through the pages, impatient for something to happen. I have that sort of mind myself, anyway, and I have tried to cater to it.

But it is perhaps my duty to interpolate a little more meat in my ski club-sandwich, a duty to many of those who were kind to me and who would wish me to tell more of their country to interested skiers, a duty to readers to whom skis mean as much as, and perhaps more than, they do to me personally. So if ski shop talk, and geographical and historical speculations seem on a tangent, turn forthwith to the next chapter and don't feel you've missed anything.

II

The circle narrows to the initiate, and questions come through like: Is the ski-ing harder than in the east. . . . Is it like Switzerland. . . . Can you get equipment and have repairs made. . . . How much does it cost?

I have furnished my narrative with little scenery. I am luckily reminded of the dampening effects of description,

than which there is nothing easier, and I have avoided, or tried to avoid, details of runs and passes and suchlike that could be spun out page after page. There is something cold-blooded and deliberate about descriptive literature, something suggesting, as one critic said of a phase of literature of the last century, that the writers had gathered together in solemn conclave, collected all their dictionaries and thesauruses. [How the devil do you pluralize Roget?] and declared: "We will now make a description."

You can describe scenery with a sentimentally glistening eye and a sonorous lilt to the voice. You can recognize the touch in the stuff a travelogue narrator reels off in coloured movies of distant lands. I verged on that, God help me, when I had the morning sun sending fingers of light into the grey shadows of the lingering dawn at Assiniboine. You just need to throw a sunrise or a sunset over your landscape and the reader knows what to expect. The formula is as well and as honourably established as the properties and off-stage effects to a mystery play.

Or you can describe your landscape painstakingly and accurately, peak by peak, with parenthetical altitudes; and leave the reader struggling to locate them all in the vague picture he has conceived in his mind. At the end of it he says irritably: And so what? There's seldom an answer.

It would be easy to follow either school of travel-writing with the Rockies, particularly in winter, and particularly in dealing with ski-ing. In many ways they are the be-all and end-all of alpine ski-ing. If you have skied among them other less lucky skiers will regard you as spiritualists might think of someone who had Gone Over There and Come Back, as a Being who has Seen, who has Been in Some Higher Plane. And the danger is that it is easy to be extravagant about them.

They are everything that can be said and imagined about them. They are classic, immense, endless, inspiring and all that. According to the dispassionate Canada Year Book they are part of the "outstanding and predominant orographical feature of Canada . . . about four hundred miles wide and covering about 530,000 square miles in

area, which embraces most of British Columbia and the Yukon . . ." in addition to part of Alberta. I'll not ask you to fit Switzerland or the Alps into this picture: they would form only a fragment of the mosaic. But it would be meaningless to do so.

To compare the Rockies and the Alps would be like comparing two attractive women, two great cities, two cheeses. Which you prefer is a matter of taste. The wildness and vastness and untrammelled (a great favourite with travel writers is untrammelled) character of the one is their charm. The convenience, the proximity, the comfortable facilities of the other is theirs.

All high mountains are, of course, spiritually akin. I like to think of a climbers' and skiers' paradise encircling the earth, beginning at eight thousand feet, and materializing wherever mountains poke their heads above that altitude. They have in common the blue sky, a sky so vividly and positively blue at times that it seems to vibrate. They share the snow that dresses the landscape in the gentlest and purest of raiment. The last trees at the timberline are usually the larch—and in such details and in the general grand scheme they all seem to have come from the same mould.

Nial Rankin, one of the many English skiers to write with knowledge and enthusiasm of ski-ing in the Rockies, compares the climb up to Skoki's Deception Pass to the grind to the Diavolezza Hut from Bernina-hauser. To me, emotionally, at least, Palu and its comrades suggested the Lake Louise group. The effect, in either part of the world, is equally exciting.

If you start matching statistics, what the Alps lack in extent they have in height. In western Canada eleven thousand feet is a giant, over twelve a super giant. The really big fellows are up Yukon way, far out of reach. Nor in the vertical interval between skiable summits and the ends of runs have they revealed much to excel the Alps. The thing to remember is that only a tiny fraction of them has been skied over, only a little finger-nail on the map has been prospected in winter.

But Westerners don't like being described as a hardy handful battling against the forces of Nature in primitive surroundings. Their good skiers, with anything from five to twenty-five years of ski-experience behind them, are rightly proud of their ability, rightly proud of the way Banff can handle a championship ski meet, accommodate visitors, and supply equipment. It is completely and utterly different from anything you'll find in Switzerland; in Alberta it would be; but you'll lack nothing in the way of clothing, accessories or common comfort.

But to enjoy the Rockies properly, you should be strong, you should be a competent skier, and, above all, you should be an enthusiastic skier. The sport should represent so much fun to you, so much happiness, that you take it as it ve it. The Rockies are no place for those who want a bar and a dance band, funiculars hey are not for those who insist upon Down-ey demand that you love the outdoors and e best of it indoors, very comfortably withal, mespun surroundings. They proved to me t to learn.

ul western optimism I think Rocky Mountain eir land will become another Switzerland, for r it has all its rival can offer fifty times over for several reasons I don't think that is likely. port is well established and its future assured, rowth will be gradual and sensible.

es lack the proximity of big centres of popula-ness of enough people with enough time and end a winter holiday. Even with seasonal d cent-a-return-mile excursions, transporta-ances ranging from hundreds into thousands item; and the ski camps, to carry themselves, anything from seven to ten dollars a day.

North American continent being as it is, long winter sports holidays will never become very popular.

Near many big Canadian cities, like Montreal and Vancouver, pleasant ski-ing over week-ends is ready to hand. The Pacific Coast ranges and the Appalachian highlands in

the east meet the requirement of the majority in the States. For the youngsters in many parts ski-ing is as easy to enjoy as it is for the inhabitants of Scandinavia and the Alps. And there are no areas accursed with winter climates like those of Great Britain or the industrial districts of northern Europe. There the winter months are enough to drive people away for holidays, anywhere. There is no doubt that England's climate has been responsible for the popularity of Switzerland's. On the North American continent there is no like situation. Where older people feel they suffer from the winter, a motor trip to the southern States will soon rectify it.

The remark that the Rockies demand you to be an all-round skier suggests a little shop talk on technique. You should carry a pack to and from the ski camps, and that may involve you in anything from twenty to seventy miles of *lang-lauf*. You should get adjusted to running in deep, untracked powder snow, and use broadish skis. The ordinary cross-country ski is too narrow. Racing skis are useless. Edges are not essential: there are few hard, beaten trails.

Deep snow ski-ing demands careful control of balance, for you must resist snow piling up over your feet at slow speeds and can only develop the forward spirit of hard snow ski-ing when speed increases the buoyancy of your skis, and they float easily on the surface. The telemark position puts too much weight on the leading skis and gives it a tendency to plunge deeper in the snow, and an unstable compromise with the weight more on the rear foot is worth trying. Feet or knees locked together in the approved manner gives too broad a barrier to the snow, and though the track should be narrow, the feet should be separated. Jump turns are invaluable, and telemarks, for legs tired by packing, most useful.

Or, at any rate, I think so. You know how people love to wrangle over technique; and how those who are the shakiest, or whose experience is the most limited, love to have the most dogmatic opinions. For that reason I had better be brief.

To readers with little experience, but great hopes in ski-ing, let me urge a little time seriously spent on the A B C of technique, certainly if you aspire to the Rockies. If you live on the side of a mountain and ski from early childhood, it will come naturally to you; but if you haven't, the sink-or-swim approach to the sport is foolish and even dangerous.

When you first put on skis, slide and push yourself about on the level until they feel as familiar to you as your own boots. Stand on one leg to get the feel of the weight of each and to learn to balance. Wave 'em about and try kick-turns. When you get the feel of them, try striking out as if you were on skates, and by stepping well ahead and off to one side, and by throwing your weight over that ski, you'll find you can skate easily across the flat.

Then learn to climb without floundering, keeping your skis horizontal to the slope and not too steeply up it so they will slip back. Try running down tiny hills and over little bumps.

And before you go farther buy a proper text-book on the subject or attend a beginner's class at a ski school, and learn to stem or snow-plow, to stop yourself that way, to turn, and so to graduate into many varieties of turning developing from that.

Once you have control on skis, you can go anywhere in safety. You need never be carried away by your skis, never fearful of any slope or any predicament. You know how to steer, how to put on the brakes. That is all there is to it. As a wise old skier once remarked: There are only two turns, one to the right and one to the left.

Ski-ing is one of the simplest sports to learn quickly, though it demands great skill and nerve and strength on the part of its champions. There is no hocus-pocus to its technique, which is very easy, though much argued over and discussed. It is a sport for your own private pleasure, and does not demand you to break your heart or your neck in competing against anyone else, though many do. It is something to do for the fun of it. To me it's the most

exciting and satisfactory way of travelling, and I love travelling.

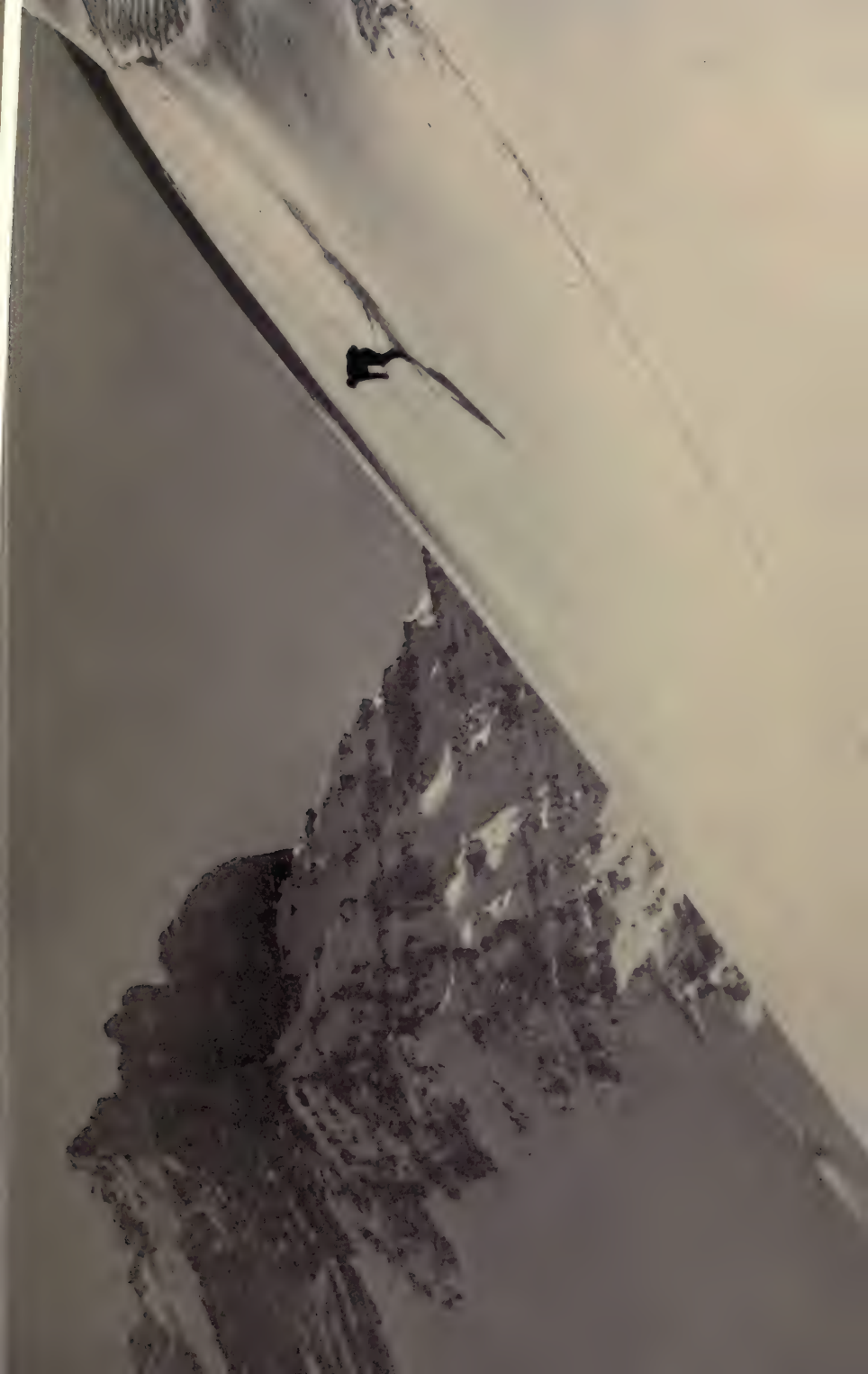
What to wear and what equipment to use is part of the discussion; and for the Rockies you should consider only the best. If you are week-ending and a broken harness or personal discomfort can be rectified at the next village, rough-and-ready equipment and clothing will do. But if you are thirty-five miles away from a railway, when your life and that of others may in an emergency depend on what you are using and wearing, take no chances. See what the experienced western skiers are using. In essentials like boots and skis and bindings and poles, they are willing to pay for the very best, though they can't afford to throw money around. Their clothing may seem nondescript, but it's serviceable. They know the value of windproof materials, of dry socks, of properly protected ears and hands.

Personally I found ideal a Norwegian balloon-silk wind-breaker with a parka hood, which I would draw tight with its string over the top of my head. With the hood up and a wisp of hair standing out from above my headband my appearance was undoubtedly fantastic, but I was warm, which was enough. You need two pairs of mits, inner mits of wool, and wind-breaker mits of leather or canvas. You need good strong boots, roomy enough for two or three pairs of socks.

You need to keep moving when it gets cold. And, of course, it does get cold in the Rockies, colder than the Alps usually. They are more northerly; the height of winter is more severe; and even the late winter and spring ski-ing season can bring cold snaps. Never be afraid of cold. In Canada it is dry and bracing. You must be dressed for it, but if your vitality is normal and you keep going, you do not notice it other than to find it invigorating, believe it or not, even at forty below.

III

In attempting to report a little of the historical background of the Rockies, I have been pathetically conscientious. I have been like the flighty-minded prospective





mother in the old novel who painfully laboured through Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* during the period of her pregnancy so her offspring would be well informed. I have exposed my brain to several books on physical geography and geology, and I am little the wiser.

Geology is another of those matters I pretend to appreciate philosophically rather than scientifically. It's a convenient approach to any serious subject, for it infers that the essence, the romance, the basic design of it is revealed to you. So with geology. The tendency of the geologists to multiply time by ten, saying that some period was thirty million years ago, or maybe again it was three hundred, fascinates me. If they can take such liberties, so can I. A recent development, whereby the chemical metamorphosis of certain radio-active minerals threatens to pin them down more definitely, is regrettable.

Consequently I dispense with all scientific nomenclature and let time mill through my mind so that millions of years pass in a second, and so that I can see at a glance just how the Rocky Mountains were built. The earth once was hot, very hot and liquid, and when it began to cool and shrink there were warpings and foldings in its surface . . . exhalations of steam and condensations of moisture . . . rivers, lakes and oceans . . . and the next day it rained. . . .

North America took a long time to be shaped as it is to-day. Other mountains preceded the Rockies and the Selkirks. The latter were the older, and the former rate as mere upstarts. I can see the glaciers spreading down from the polar ice-cap, carving deep into the landscape with the rocks they had caught up beneath them, dumping great piles of debris when they began finally to melt, and seemed to retreat whence they had come.

I can see the slow twisting of the stratas of the Rockies, the gradual upending and fracturing along the valley of the Bow, the immediate process of decay and disintegration that began once the mountains had been raised from the bosom of the earth. What Nature had brought forth, Nature, in the endless and vicious cycle of life, immediately began to destroy. And so the valleys were filled with soil

from the summits, and the mountains were carried by the rivers to form deltas that encroached upon the lakes and seas.

You will understand why I like to be poetic about it when the only help I can get from official sources is an illuminating paragraph like this: "The Cordilleran region was affected by two great mountain-building revolutions since the Palæozoic. The first took place in the late Jurassic or early Cretaceous, and affected the whole region from Selkirk mountains westward. It was accompanied by igneous intrusions on a vast scale, and subsequent erosion has uncovered these batholiths, exposing a broad bank that extends down the Pacific coast, curving eastward near the International Boundary. This period of intrusion formed the most important metallogentic epoch of British Columbia. The second great mountain-building revolution was the Laramide of Eocene time. In this period the great thickness of sediments that had accumulated in the geosyncline along the site of the present Rocky Mountains was folded up to form that range . . ."

To save my soul from bewilderment I want as little information as possible. I like to think unrestrained of the Rockies shaping up at a period when time could lightly be multiplied by ten and when, if you watched for another million years, or maybe ten million, from the foothills you could see the first prehistoric monsters browsing ponderously on the prairies where their bones have since been found. Then, long after, would come the Indians.

They were immigrants, and during thousands of years they spread across the continent, divided the territory amongst their bands, and developed their own languages and cultures. Nature had given them no clue that led to such civilizations as existed in Central and South America, and until the coming of the white man they maintained an elemental and equable balance of life among themselves. It was rude, of something close to Stone Age simplicity, but it was intelligent enough and happy.

Then, in one of the first cruel parables of the history of armament manufacture, the Indians were given arms.

The rival interests of the French and the English added fuel to internecine warfare; and the Indians set about their own destruction on a scale that bettered anything the whites were able to manage in hand-to-hand fighting. But, more malignant than anything, smallpox, tuberculosis and venereal disease settled into their stocks; and the Indian retired to degenerate further on reservations in the great land that once was his. There are signs of improvement now, of better hygiene, better conditions and education; but there can be no Indian who can think calmly of the history of his people, and feel any respect for the descendants of his conquerors to-day.

What has been done. . . . History shrugs its shoulders. It has happened so often. It has happened in Africa and in Asia, in Central and South America, in the Antipodes. Civilization has come, and where there has been peace and beauty there has come cheapness and vulgarity and the policies of Machiavelli. It may be false sentimentality, but there must be a bitter book somewhere depicting the growth of civilizations and the disappearance of aborigines, along with the buffalo, so that now we can turn on the radio and hear dance music all day, and so that women and children can be bombed and machine-gunned from the air.

Man's destiny may come to no cataclysmic end for the power of good has, in the long run, dominated over that of evil. But I wonder if such optimism is only that of the white, and what must be the view of the red man, the yellow and the black.

The Indians in the Rockies are recalled by Mount Assiniboine, the name of the tribe dominating the prairies, and by Sundance Canyon of the Bloods, where my ski trips in two cases began. The former were once great buffalo hunters and lived a nomadic life until decimated in inter-tribal wars with firearms, and by disease. Known as the Stonies, they survive on a reservation in the foothills, and keep nominal touch with another part of their tribe divided from them by the arbitrary boundary line and now surviving in a reservation in Montana.

Sundance Canyon recalls a tribal ceremony in honour

of the sun in which the whole tribe took part, and for which festivities, games and dances were held lasting several days. There were masochistic exhibitions by the young braves who would tear flesh from their breasts by leather thongs, but which were not apparently an essential part of the event. This fête was observed by the Bloods, a subdivision of the Blackfeet, and is celebrated to this day by them on their reserve in the Rockies, and also by the Stonies.

It is doubtful that the Indians had much to do with the Rockies, other than to hunt for game occasionally in the valleys, though some coast tribes habitually crossed them in parts to hunt buffalo and carry meat back to their villages. When the white men did come, and explorers appeared in the west and north-west, the Indians, though they proved great liars in many cases, aided much in the finding of passes.

Alexander MacKenzie was the first white man to find a way through to the coast, in 1793. Others were to find other routes, Fraser and Thompson, and the redoubtable Sir George Simpson in 1841. The latter crossed Canada partly by canoe, made a tour of the world and used Simpson Pass, near where I had been at Sunshine Cabin.

I struggled, as I went east away from the snows of the Rockies and across prairies already touched by the warmth of spring, to shape some coherent picture of this land since the coming of the whites. I realized its history had begun only yesterday, that I was living in the midst of it. I had, when I had been first in the Rockies, spoken to the late Tom Wilson, who was the first white man to see Lake Louise. He was gentle, likeable, a thoroughly nice human being. His generation were the William the Conquerors of Canada, and it was exciting to have known them. They were not supermen, but they had a deal of courage and vision. The tragedy of their lives is that their descendants are often content to be commonplace.

It is so easy, so usual, to apologize for the history of Canada on account of its relative shallowness, because it begins only a few centuries ago, because in the west it

begins practically within the memory of living man. But surely that gives it an especial and dramatic quality. A hundred years ago, and the canoe route across Canada was still in use and had been worn deep at the portages by the moccasins of generations of voyagers; by the feet of Indians, for hundreds upon hundreds of years. Fifty years ago and the steel that was taking me back east was joined for the first time and Canada and the Empire bound more firmly together.

My grandmother remembered the Rebellion of 1837 in "Muddy York," her grandparents were involved in the Revolution.

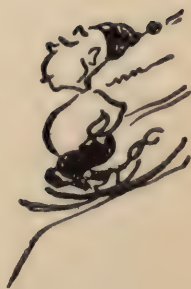
All these little things are as significant as the Roman roads in England; as the Armada; they mean as much to the history of my country.

I struggled to form this picture, but I think I failed to see it in proper perspective, robbed a little of conventional glamour, infused with a humanity few books have so far revealed, shot with wilful qualities familiarity makes it difficult to detect. I had to be far removed in time and space to see it in what I think is the proper light. I was to continue my journey later in the year eastward across the Atlantic and to live for a long time away from my homeland. I was to fall in love with another country and yet to be homesick for my own. I was, in the working out of a personal destiny, to get a lot more ski-ing to write about, and in seeking myself to find out new things about my country.



Part Two

“Young Man About Switzerland”





Chapter Eleven

GREAT ADVENTURE

I

THIS is a book of travel, with the tracks made by my skis as its thread, and the great holes where my body was flung headlong into the snow as its punctuation. It is not a novel, and there is no one character in it long enough, other than my own, to carry it along. Nor is it an autobiography, for I have no excuse to write one, nor the reader probably any inclination to read one.

And yet to jump, as a travel book, clear from the Rockies into the Alps is likely to be a wrench to the reader. You need some time to get orientated to the new surroundings, a period of transition so you are aware a change has taken place. If you don't you can safely skip this chapter. The other day I flew to France in an hour and some odd minutes in a British Airways plane: it took me a long time to realize I was where I was when I landed, some time psychologically to become adjusted.

So, even within the formula of a travel narrative, I think you should know why I went to Switzerland, and why I settled in England in the first place. The change is far more complex than a simple change of scene. There had been some sort of uncomfortable turnover going on in my own mind, I had moved as much mentally as I had geographically—whether forward or backward it matters not, suffice to say that I had moved—and I was looking on the world about me, or beginning to look at it, with a completely different viewpoint. I am not sure yet precisely what this new viewpoint is, or what the old one was: I am too close to them yet to know, but as

surely as this section begins on new pages in this book, so it begins new chapters in my own life.

I'll expose little more of this personal confusion other than to confess that it's exciting to one to know that something may be evolving from one's bewilderment, that after a period of inertia things are beginning to happen again. I mean spiritually, new curiosities, new hungers, new problems.

For instance, in the Rockies I was toiling about at as business-like a pace as I know how, seeking to report intelligently on what I thought of ski-ing in the Rockies, and what I thought should be done about it, tempered the while with a knowledge born of long experience that little I did or said or wrote would really make much difference. But, as straight ski-ing, it was a glorious assignment, and I enjoyed it hugely.

Still, all this time I was subconsciously obsessed with a dread very terrible to a young man, the dread of retreat. In editing, in publicity, in straight writing—in my regular occupations—I had ceased to develop, ceased to be enthusiastic. And in all these matters you must, to carry you along, retain an interest and belief in your work. In the first two occupations at least the magic is soon lost and your efficiency deteriorates. If in the course of your life, which is less often in smaller places than it is in great ones, you have much contact with people more vital and curious and active than you think you are yourself, your awareness of this danger and your fear of giving in is quickened; and you realize that you've got to do something about it.

You can argue most plausibly to others on the extreme difficulty of the technique of your work, how you must think of this and that, and how it takes simply years and years of experience to think of all such things. They will be flatteringly impressed: but in your own heart you will gradually feel nauseated when you go into your little sales talk. It's akin to a remark credited to Don Byrne by a wise old friend of mine, to the effect that a writer could always remember the widow waiting by the

fire for his stories, and how she always had a little white coin to give in return for those that had a happy ending; but that he would know that God would see him for the louse that he was if he gave in and wrote them for her.

The least thing in my own life that I could do was to go away on a holiday, far away. The best thing was to stay away, and to face completely new problems, albeit problems which my experience and inclinations challenged me to face. So I went to England, and stayed. Or should I say came to England? For I am there now, still wondering in the bad days if it was a good idea after all, and patting myself encouragingly on the back during the good ones.

There may have been some link between the fact that *en route* to the Rockies I read Beverly Baxter's *Strange Street*, which is all about the strangeness of Fleet Street; and the fact that I came to England in the autumn of 1936 and forthwith began to work in Fleet Street. I pointed this out, after I had got a slight toe-hold, when I first met the writer of that book; and a look of mingled guilt and dread crossed his face. Mr. Baxter's success had been so great that it can be considered phenomenal, and enough to make suspect any Canadian poking his nose into the ancient hot-bed of printer's ink from which he so successfully sprung. And I am afraid Mr. Baxter had seen so many of his fellow countrymen ingenuously or truculently attempt to duplicate his career, that he shies off at the slightest suspicion that he may have been responsible.

But the British newspaper world and its Canadian giants were safe from my sling shots; and I lapsed, after a period of returning to cub-reporterhood, into writing fiction. I came to know many editors of magazines and made many heartening contacts in that phase of journalism; but though I wrote and re-wrote again, wrote articles and more articles; my average of success was low. When the winter closed down my spirits sagged somewhere lower than the lowest tubes beneath London, and I experimented gingerly with the early stages of insanity.

To go completely bughouse would have been an excellent escape, and I saw every day on the streets dozens who had

successfully eliminated the world of reality, and who were smiling and chattering away to themselves quite unconcerned in a world of their own making. To go skiing presented another way out, and fortunately I went ski-ing.

The fact that I was a Canadian skier, and had co-edited the Canadian Ski Year Book for three years with that dear old veteran, H. P. Douglas, deceived the Ski Club of Great Britain, of which I was an overseas member, into thinking I might have something interesting to say at their Annual Dinner, and I sat between two old friends and was caught for an instant from the journalistic doldrums into which I was slipping, and set, as it were, upon a pedestal, confronted by a very low microphone.

To be brooding over the uselessness of your own life, the hopelessness of your ever being able to write or earn a decent living, or lay out a magazine as you think it should be laid out, and to be snatched from the depths of depression and plumped before a good dinner and five hundred people, most of whom seemed very glad to see you and to hear you, no matter how silly you sounded, was a sort of Aladdinesque adventure; and I shall never quite believe it happened. But so it must have been, for I remember Alan d'Egville was on one side and Mr. Amery, the president of the Ski Club, was on the other; and I had to talk into the same microphone that had been adjusted to their short stature. I had skied and fought and drunk and worked with the former at the Seignior Club in Canada, and I had ridden and argued and climbed with the latter in attacking Mount Amery in the Rockies in '29. So I was made to feel at home; and a new lot of genii began to materialize to help me.

A fellow guest at that dinner was a charming giant of a man. I say giant a little resentfully and jealously, for I am six three, and when anyone towers over me by nine inches I enjoy the rare experience of feeling physically overwhelmed. He knew a lot about Switzerland, and told me to see a friend of his who knew still more about the ski-ing I hoped to do there that winter.

So I called on this friend, Mr. Bland I shall call him, who mingled ski and newspaper shop talk in a way that showed he was several jumps ahead of me in such matters, and who put me at my ease at once.

I boasted, for it was an up-day not long after the banquet, and the sun was shining, that I had managed to get by so far "on my face value."

He looked at me carefully for a moment.

"That's odd," he remarked solemnly, "because you look rather like an ape."

And naturally that straightened things away.

It was like a couple of old Wolf Cubs exchanging their secret signs. I knew him for a human being, and I hurriedly said my appearance must give him a great fellow feeling, and would he please go and jump in the Thames.

Somewhere in a rather eccentric conversation he remarked: "Of course, you'll write a book about your ski-ing."

And, as I always agree automatically when anyone says "of course," I said: "Of course."

It was rather a silly thing to remark, and it has resulted in no end of work, for I had never written a book before, and may never again. But still, there it was, and here it is.

He has proved, has Bland, one of those friends with a variety of Jekyll-and-Hyde complex found rarely in business. He knows his job forward and backward, he manages it with cold-blooded efficiency, and he has just enough innate madness to make him fascinating. He gave me some excellent official pointers about travelling and ski-ing in Switzerland, and when I was over there he would send me fantastic little notes and clippings that must have completely bewildered the serious-minded organization through which they passed.

Anyway, with one thing and another, I escaped to Switzerland at the end of January. The travail of bearing bad fiction had continued, together with the strain of having it rejected. And the English winter had closed down.

Just how malignant the English climate, indoors and out, can appear to a Canadian facing it for the first time is difficult to describe. He is likely accustomed to dry cold and sunshine, to warm houses, and to an outer atmosphere that works like wine in his lungs. If he is young and skis, as I did, winter is something to look forward to, a season as amusing and as active as summer.

When he comes to England his blood congeals in the dampness of temperatures much higher than those to which he is accustomed, but that he finds infinitely more uncomfortable. His throat and his lungs catch in an atmosphere that seems exhausted and vitiated. His eyes can't get accustomed to the short hours of daylight, the pervading greyness, and the rows of lamps that quickly loose themselves as yellow or orange blobs in the haze of the city. Above all, he can't get warm indoors. He has been used to dressing lightly at all seasons and only donning heavy overcoats for going outdoors in winter. Indoors the temperature of his house is constant at about seventy the year round. The tomb-like chill of an English house, the latent suspicion that comfort and immorality go hand in hand, depresses a Canadian; and he is wise in heading for a genuinely cold country to get warm. But this is all old stuff; and the English are so accustomed to being insulted on account of their un-central heating and their cooking, which I haven't even mentioned, that I'll get no rise.

And so, I was glad to escape with my skis from England. I was hungry, desperately hungry for the clean snows that had been part of my winter for nearly thirty years. I wanted to rush off and battle with life physically and avoid the sense of failure that came from not knowing just how and where it should be attacked.

I found I could get the best possible ski equipment, edges and so forth, in London; and I had my skis sent over after me from Montreal; and after discussing my problems with various salesmen, some of whom managed to be deliciously superior about it all, I embarked.

Where to begin my ski tour of Switzerland I do not

know. How to write about it, in what vein, is another problem. In writing about the Rocky Mountains I tried to deal with them as a Canadian writing of his own people. In writing of the Alps I shall have to write about the English, for they come into the picture by the thousands, to the English: a terrifying undertaking. I'll be easier in my mind if I can imagine the reader now to be a Canadian like myself, or an American, or something equally foreign, say a Scotsman or an Irishman. Also it would be well if the reader remains rather unfamiliar with ski-ing and the ritual of winter sports in the Alps, so that he can share the novelty of the whole spectacle with me.

The English, of course, I found as odd and different as the Swiss; and during my autumn in England I found myself marvelling about them with other interlopers like myself, and agreeing that they were incorrigible but interesting. The spectacle of the English released and uninhibited in Switzerland was still more interesting; and I was to live to see sights that will ever bewilder the "foreigner."

I was to see adults devoting whole evenings to strenuous parlour games, submitting to social organization in a way that English people in Canada like to say is typically American. The paid organizers were usually distinguished looking old gentlemen, ex-colonels or ex-generals, who were properly respected by all the pukka people, and who properly ignored those they thought weren't.

I was to see barriers of shyness go down and other equally deceptive barriers go up; hearty hail-fellow-well-met barriers, sporting-snobbery barriers. I was to see scenes from conventional English social comedies played out, complete in dinner jackets, in the fantastic salons of Swiss hotels. I was to be amused, angry and hurt; but I was to meet a few of the dearest and kindest of people, and I was to come to know and like the English a lot better for having met them abroad.

So I'll solve the problem of how to write about it by sticking to an essentially detached and Canadian viewpoint; and I think I should start the business about the

time I crossed the Channel. The adventure is one marked by much atmosphere; and for those unfamiliar with it, some of the details may amuse.

II

But are the details of travel amusing? From a Canadian viewpoint, they're anything but funny. It's too appallingly uncomfortable if you expect reasonable service at a reasonable price. A sleeper costs a fortune; and the alternatives are heart-breaking. It's just about as uncomfortable travelling across Europe in an ordinary train to-day as it was in a stage coach two centuries ago. In twenty-four hours you suffer as much, the only difference being that in that time you cover perhaps ten times the distance.

It all seems barbaric and smacking of the middle ages to me; but then so do many other unimportant matters in the old world, and it indicates a foolish tendency on my part to judge a thing bad because it is different. It is a basis which we accuse visiting English critics of using in Canada; and it shows that we're spoilt. Our trains in Canada are bigger and give the passenger more space to himself, and more to move about in, simply because we built on an ambitious scale and have fewer people travelling. We wish we had more. It is silly to maintain a lofty attitude when trains are jammed and space is at a premium. One should be glad enough to get a place and philosophical enough to endure and even enjoy the journey.

Anyway I found the trip *to* Switzerland as strenuous as any ski-ing I did *in* Switzerland. It began in the late afternoon and ended at noon the next day; I was exceptional in that I secured a good hour's sleep during that time; and when I arrived at my hotel there was the crowning touch that I had to sleep in the bathroom. Some people inconsiderately tried to have a bath at the same time, and moreover it rained.

Here was I, remembering my all-day ski-hikes in the Rockies, and ready to brave the rigours of the Alps,





grumbling over an inevitable train journey, and citing a compact combination of bedroom and bath as if it involved acute hardship. However, it was a relief to enter into the electrically charmed circle of the Swiss railways, to escape the dirt and grime of the others, to hear the odd two notes of the warning and control bells in the Swiss stations, and to enjoy that sense of security and efficiency characteristic of that country.

Just how to become adjusted to the business I should have learned from one of my travelling companions. I glimpsed him in a sheltered nook on the boat crossing the Channel, where I paced chilled upon the second-class deck and hoped I wouldn't be ill; and I found him well established in my compartment on the train at the other side.

To my surprise he spoke first. An Englishman breaking the ice! I had yet to be aware of the metamorphosis that comes over the Anglo-Saxon character when it leaves its own country. He was a soldier retired and shelved too young. A good mind, a bit misdirected in the first place probably, completely patterned and aware enough of it to be sorry for it; and kind and interesting.

"Now at Poonah . . ." was almost the way he put things.

He knew the ropes so well that he had us organized in no time. Through his persuasion I think one person in the compartment believed she'd be more comfortable with some friends in a more crowded compartment; and later he whispered hoarsely that there was an empty coupé next door and that I'd better snaffle it, which I promptly did. He got valises adjusted on the floor and feet wrapped up in coats and blankets. It was all uncomfortable, but he made it much less so, and I saw that he would make an excellent bushman. It required just as much rope-knowing, just as much ingenuity and resourcefulness to settle comfortably into a railway compartment in Europe as it did to make a brush camp in the open in the Rockies; and I watched in appreciative admiration.

He said he had practically been born in a train and

his first memories were of a small hammock slung across the luggage racks where his parents would hang him for the night. The last I saw of him was when he was being received by a younger sahib who practically turned out the guard and saluted when he arrived; and when he was busy fitting back into character. It was a pity, because he was more companionable as a traveller than as a soldier.

A night and half a day in a train puts you inevitably into touch with the people about you, and after the faces had been sorted out by changes at Speiz and Zweisimmen, I gathered who were bound for Gstaad, my destination, and who weren't.

There seemed to be half a dozen, relative strangers to one another I think, who were teamed under a formidable but fascinating old lady who turned out to be one of those enterprising souls who organize and conduct winter sports parties and get a certain amount of transportation and hotel accommodation on the strength of it. She had daughters scattered all over the world, had climbed in Switzerland for fifty summers and seemed to have taken up ski-ing in her sixties. I chose the hotel for which she was bound, and landed in the bath; but otherwise I had no cause to regret the accident.

With her were a small man and his equally small wife. I was put at their table at dinner and found they had all faithfully changed into their best for the occasion. I realized I was in the midst of the stuff that mans the outposts of Empire, where the sun never sets on an unboiled shirt. The wife, who was an agreeable little body otherwise, called her man, shrilly and incessantly, "Bingy," as if he were a small dog whose sole object in life was to run up to her and waggle his tail violently.

And the last I heard of them was her penetrating voice dominating the broad fields by the ski school: "Oh, Bingy, Bingy," she was wailing, "come and help me, Bingy," and she was making not the slightest move to get up from the snow where she was prostrate. I suspect

it was her technique, unconscious or otherwise, to keep her husband in his place; but if practised on me I'm afraid there would have been murder.

So gradually on the train I came to know these people, and the adventure of climbing higher into the Alps became common to all of us. After Zweisimmen the train was smaller and made of sterner stuff, for it tackled the stiffest grades, and dragged us higher and deeper into the mists of the mountains.

For long I had been eager for the sight of snow, and for long I was disappointed. There was none upon crossing the Swiss border, none at the first stations. Mountains showed against the sky, jagged and uncertain in the distance, but in the foreground, no snow. Later there were patches on the ground, but they were drear and rain-washed and only served to make the landscape dirty and desolate. As the clouds closed round us and my ears began to click as they became adjusted to lessening air-pressure, there was more.

When we came into the open and there was sunshine for a time and patches of blue sky, the landscape had changed completely: the world was white, and my faith was restored.

I was to learn that snow does not bury Switzerland as it does most of my more-northerly country, but that it is conveniently and picturesquely restricted to valleys and peaks over three or four thousand feet; and that in the lower winter resorts, one side of a valley may be white and the other, usually the southern exposure, dirty brown. Only at five and six thousand was snow definitely established, and often I was to look down from the snows into the dark greenness and brownness of the lower altitudes. I was also to be thwarted by great gaps in the snow belt and by periods of mists and rain and heavy snow-fall from completing the trans-alpine junket I had conceived of; but it was to be fun.

When we disembarked finally at Gstaad and a dignified concierge in an immaculate uniform and a hat with bright

gold letters shot around a corner in the village squatting on a small sled, I realized that below the mists and the snows lay the world I knew, and didn't like; and that here about me at last was another world, much funnier, much quainter . . . infinitely curiouser.

Chapter Twelve

SO THIS IS SWITZERLAND

I

AS in the Rockies I had hit upon old scents, old trails I had known in summer, so in Switzerland I attempted to recapture what I had known, and gave up. I had lived ten years before at Montreux, and once or twice a week I had passed through Gstaad.

The tiny church there was all that I could identify. The valley I remembered as broad and pleasant after the rugged walls of the Col de Pillon; but now in winter it looked steep and formidable; and the prospect of sliding down its sides on skis changed my opinion completely. It is curious having the two pictures in my mind as I write: one of a summer long ago, one of a winter yesterday. They are completely different.

But before I elaborate the winter picture I should indicate that of summer in the background.

It is a picture full of highly coloured picture-postcard snow-capped mountains, blue lakes and motor buses. It had been my responsibility, when I was twenty, to aid in the conducting of parties of tourists from Montreux, up the valley of the Rhône, over to Gstaad for lunch, along the valley to Gruyères for tea, and home to Montreux for dinner.

It involved much embarrassment. I knew damnably little about the country-side and was only slightly relieved to find that the tourists under my charge wanted to know very little anyway. If I said blithely: "We are now going through a village," they would laugh. And later when I announced: "And this is another village," they smiled uproariously. They got bits of information, but

not much; and the most acute agony was involved in giving them the facts of life.

At the top of the pass by Les Diablerets I would tell them vaguely about the little devils that sent down avalanches in olden times—like the Abominable Snow Men in the Himalayas, I suppose—and end, with mounting colour: “We will stop by this chalet for ten minutes. . . .” Pause while I faced the issue. “The toilet is up the stairs on the left-hand side.” Another pause while they took that in. “Remember, we leave in ten minutes.” And thereat I would disappear over the side of the charabanc like a retiring Jack-in-the-box.

The climax came at Gruyères, that most romantic of villages sitting plunk atop of a small hill in the middle of a broad valley. We visited the castle, beautifully preserved and restored, and I shepherded my gaping flock from room to room until we came to the Count’s bedroom.

“And this was his room,” I’d say, flaming at my daring, “and that little passage went to the room of a lady friend.”

The story was picked up from another guide. It shocked me, and it shocked my tourists, who were all sent out by a religious travel agency; but they always looked interested and perked up considerably after it.

We were given a wonderous tea nearby, featured by cream, almost Devonshire in thickness, and jam; and because I was the courier, because I brought the business, it never lost me a penny, and I lived like a lord. Driving homeward, dropping down toward Vevey and Lake Geneva and watching with superior amusement as the other passengers shrank back from any suggestion of an abyss at the edge of the road, I would try and sing Swiss songs with the driver; and because one of them was to the same tune as “Ma Normandie,” I was able to hum in relative harmony.

My room in the hotel overlooked Lac Léman, and the sun invariably turned the crown of the Dent du Midi to rose in the evening. There was a pretty little Swiss girl in the room next door, and we used to embrace fondly

over the balcony railings every night before we went severally to bed.

"Plus," she would murmur softly, "Plus . . . plus . . ." But that, God forgive me, was all there was to it. I was young and innocent, and her parents lived in the room beyond.

Ah, yes, I liked Switzerland and the Swiss.

I haven't much sympathy with snobbish dismissals of the Swiss as being a nation of hotel-keepers. That may be as true as the shop-keeping classification of the English. But it is not true of the whole, and for the class to which it applies it must be said that they made a good job of it. No one of intelligence in the hotel business can have any innate respect or liking for "Society," and I suspect sneering of this sort comes from those nonplussed by mentalities superior to their own.

It's a spiritually depressing business, and can throw human values all awry for those involved; but the Swiss are not all keepers of big hotels such as most people see; and those who are improve vastly on more personal acquaintance. As a whole, they have to struggle for their territorial and cultural integrity in many curious ways. The tremendous influx of sightseers is as subtly threatening as outside political influence, and you will find the Swiss as disturbed over the mentality of their country as I am coming to be over mine.

The Swiss are not the owners of an amusement park, they are not just polite people who run hotels, or gentle peasants who shovel paths for the winter visitor. They are clever men of science and medicine, savants, men of letters and of state in a truly worldly way. They are business men and clerks and factory workers. Men who can talk three or four languages and view with cynicism the impinging politics of half a dozen neighbouring nations. They are citizen soldiers who train on foot and on skis and are undoubtedly as tough as the hardy mercenaries from the mountains who were involved in half the medieval wars of Europe. The traveller seldom meets them.

Switzerland is a difficult country to know It is divided

by its great mountains, its four languages, its tourist shop-front; but cutting clear through it all, binding the whole together, is something intangible and exciting, a spirit born of peaceful countryfolk uniting and keeping strong in the face of common enemies, a spirit a foreigner can never quite understand.

It is a pity that so many people judge the land by its big hotels, usually ugly places, as ugly inside and out as any blighting the English seacoast, though a lot warmer and more comfortable; and it's a pity more experiment is not made with the smaller, less pretentious places. Because I had chosen to write and be poor, I had a glorious time in the latter, and I saw the country. I escaped, in the two months that followed my arrival in Gstaad, the hordes of people talking my own language, and carefully isolating themselves from the land into which they had come to visit; and in microscopic groups I came to know and like the Swiss themselves.

I hate big hotels and all they imply: their sameness the world over, their ability to surround you completely and shield you from the land in which they're built, their guests who look so dull or bored or pretentious, their regimentation and their potted palms. I like little hotels if, as in Switzerland, they are immaculately clean and produce good food. But for all this liking and disliking, I shall probably live in big hotels when I can afford it again, just to bolster up my morale and to have a bath handy.

II

But when I first saw an awe-inspiring concierge hunched on a small hand-sled, I realized I was in for something new. Here was a new Switzerland and another kind of ski-ing. Here were winter sports put to work and organized in a business-like style. Here the baker and the laundryman and the postman used sleds, and when they had delivered their loads at the top of their routes they slid back home again. Here playthings were taken seriously. Races were held on them, at a mile a minute. Later I was to think

bob-sleighs a remarkably adolescent way of breaking one's neck without getting anywhere. But to see adults dragging these little sleds behind them, and to see them slithering down the roads using their heels as brakes, was little short of fantastic.

Instead of a theatrical Rocky Mountain setting of impassive grandeur, I saw I had made an entrance into an animated set that verged on musical comedy. The star performers would talk huntin' and shootin'; there would be an old-school-tie chorus; there would be a few picturesque guides and instructors in comedy parts; a concierge and a *maître d'hôtel* surely; and a few nondescript characters like myself who would take all the punishment. I had never skied this way before. It was bound to be fun.

The hotel, to which we walked to save a franc or something, was high above the village; and, the day after I was promoted from the bathroom, my window overlooked a scene of great charm. There was the valley, into which a tributary valley entered at that point; its pattern of fields and fences, roads and railway tracks, all lined in immaculate white; its slopes patched picturesquely by dark masses of conifers; and its skyline on three sides, soft and wooded in some parts, jagged in others, and showing vistas of more distant peaks in others. There was nothing cold or forbidding about this landscape. It was just a beautiful valley, softened by trees and flooded with sunshine that seemed to be cupped and kept for the express joy of those who lived in it.

(I have now "made a description.")

The afternoon of my arrival was featured by a drizzle of rain. I found the landscape peopled with little children in rubber boots and coloured capes; and my feverish traveller's eye tried to see how amusing it all was, when at heart I was tired from the journey and bitterly disappointed over the break in the weather. I paddled about on my skis on the floor of the valley, watched, like a good Canadian, a Swiss saw-mill at work, and finally went to bed in my bathroom and got a nap before dinner.

It's a period best forgotten, and I behaved true to form

by endangering my health by overdoing it from the very first moment. I was stiff the next day; and the second day I was stiffer. I stretched my lungs and strained my leg muscles, and wrenched and battered my body so it hurt to take a deep breath. But I seemed able to take all the punishment that was coming to me; and I survived fundamentally undamaged.

Naturally the wisest thing to do on arrival in Switzerland, is to do nothing. You need rest after travelling; you need to become acclimatized to altitudes that range from three to six thousand feet; you need to break in your ski-ing muscles gently. So the wisest thing is to relax for a bit, which is of course quite impossible.

The only wise thing I did early in my tour was to go to school. The Swiss are sensible people, and they have carried their organization of winter sports to a point so that they see to it that you enjoy yourself. To ensure this they enable you to curl or skate or ski or slide on your sled, or get dragged around on your sled; they stage community dances, carnivals, and even beauty competitions; they have contests in every sport for every type of player; they have tests; and most important of all they give class lessons.

In some places like Gstaad the teaching is free, or is included in a small surcharge absorbed into your hotel bill; in other places there is a reasonable scale of fees. The Community, through its *Kurverein*, maintains all winter sports facilities, like roads, paths, sledge or luge runs, marked ski-trails, jumps, rinks and so forth; they have first-aid posts and S O S telephone-boxes at strategic points; and they do their best to have you properly and quickly looked after if you are so unlucky and perhaps foolish as to break your neck.

But the teaching part is shrewdest, for if you go to ski, and don't know how, and become discouraged and even damaged in trying to learn unaided, you'll never return.

Unless you are an unenterprising misanthrop you'll lack nothing in the way of diversion, chances to meet people in five languages, and chances to learn and to tour.

You can go as a lone wolf, or can hunt in pairs, and be sure of finding a pack to your fancy. They are not and were not my own tactics, because I like to keep on the move, but few skiers are accursed with such a Wandering Jew complex.

This applies not only to Gstaad, but also to every other resort I visited. They are all equally well organized, their ski-schools are conducted to a standard pattern, and the instructors are trained in the same style of teaching. The reader must forgive this dose of information, but I'm afraid some poor devil will get infested with this ski-madness as he reads through this book, and that he'll curse me to his early grave for not giving him something to work on.

So I went to school and presented myself to the chief instructor. It was on a broad sloping field rising sharply in terraces to one side, and there were groups of people practising on skis at different points. Some were on the flat, some were on gentle slopes, some were half-way up, and some were on the steeper part at the top. Each group was proceeding in the same style. The instructor would demonstrate something, how to run, how to turn, how to stop; he would stand and watch, and one by one his pupils would follow, succeed or fail, and he would call his formulæ, in English or French or German or Italian as they descended.

My vanity was bucked because I was sent to the highest class; but as it was my first day and I was using steel edges for the first time, I was not over confident. My instructor was a woman, a healthy-looking wench, with a pleasant smile and a great fund of patience; and I found myself attempting an open Christy, a turn I avoid at all costs, and the attempting was chastening.

I took it all very seriously, because I had carefully read the "Ten Golden Rules for the Ski-Scholar" posted in my hotel; and as they are good rules, and have special charm; I think I should quote them here.

"(1) Keep your outfit in perfect order (skis, boots, sticks, fixation) and have your skis always suitably greased.

(2) Be punctual for the beginning of the lessons. Discipline is a good thing and you will receive thankful thoughts from your co-scholars and the teacher. (3) Do follow the instructions of the ski-teacher. He knows his business well and you will benefit by it. (4) If you don't make any apparent progress, don't forget that it may be due to your personal deficiencies. (5) The ski-teacher is not a baggage-porter. (6) Follow the courses by any weather. You will always learn something new. (7) Do only join excursions as soon as you are certain not to be of any encumbrance to the party. (8) On excursions you need a rucksack, gloves, glasses, sealskins, ski-wax, a knife, something to eat and drink and quite a practice in the art of how to ski. (9) Be always good spirited. It helps such a lot. (10) If you are not satisfied with the School, let us know it. If, on the contrary, you are thoroughly content, let it be known to all your friends."

In the afternoon, not content with racking my body with all this unwonted exercise, I make a trip to the Hornberg, a mountain back of Gstaad, from where there was a run from six thousand odd feet down to the village at three thousand. The place is surrounded by such mountains and there are runs down from each. The whole set-up is typical of a winter-sports centre so I had better establish it clearly in your mind before passing on to others.

If this were to be a practical guide, I would dutifully attempt to give all details of my runs, and of the runs I didn't run; but it isn't, so you are spared a maze of geography in Swiss-German that would completely arrest the narrative. You must remember that every mountain is charted for climbs and walks in summer, and for climbs and runs in winter, as closely if not more closely than the Home Counties are described for hikers by the London transport authorities.

I am about to trespass into terrain thousands of people know intimately. I am to describe courses others have worn smooth years go, and confess to taking so many minutes on runs that some can snort over and claim to

have accomplished in as many seconds. There are skiers like motorists who value the time-and-speed-factor above all, and in rare moments of daring I am in complete sympathy with them; but on the whole I potter cautiously about. In the Alps I tackled completely unknown terrain under strict control, and trekked slowly under a pack, paused when I was tired, and sat down and watched with almost sensual pleasure when I came to some prospect of fresh magnificence. Too many are case hardened, I believe; and I want to think of my ski-ing with the freshness and enthusiasm and trepidation that were mine as I trekked from one valley to another. I want to suggest that I was travelling in a way any competent skier would enjoy far more than staying put and playing one course, as it were, in the shadow of a funicular.

But at the outset I must guard against the complacencies of a skier who is sure his particular way of ski-ing is the best. Some people love to toil over the country-side, some to slide downhill; and to each of them those who don't ski likewise are obviously low fellows. I have caught myself making superior cracks about climbing by funiculars and then turning downhill and hastening away from paradise. This is of course arrant nonsense, for if it pleases a man to ski backwards, or spend his holiday entirely climbing or entirely sliding downhill there is no reason why he shouldn't do so. Particularly if he has only a week or two weeks to do it. Nor is there any reason to pity a man because he uses a luge or a toboggan or a bob-sled or a pair of figure-skates. One has to be careful of one's private conceits: too many verge on rudeness.

Anyway, in the roundabout style I have of telling my stories, I went up to the Hornberg.

There are many sensible ways of circumventing hill-climbing in Switzerland; and at Gstaad this particular route involved boarding an electric train at the station and returning back the way I had to come to Saanenmoser, dashing with one's skis into a caterpillar-equipped open lorry with runners under the front-wheels, grinding in this up through the forest for a thousand or fifteen hundred

feet, and switching into a "Funi" for the last few hundred feet of ascent. The latter was a sled dragged upwards by a cable, and counterbalanced by a twin sled, both running in well-worn parallel grooves of snow. It was an excellent arrangement, requiring little permanent or expensive equipment, and riding triumphantly over all fresh snow-falls and thus requiring little maintenance.

At the top I was decanted in the middle of a snow-field with a small building showing against the snow-line at the top; and in some queer way the half-dozen people with me disappeared, and I was left bewildered and alone. I put on my skis, trudged up the gentle gradient, and the building resolved itself into a restaurant, with another, rival restaurant, just beyond it. I had expected something romantic and remote, a point from which I could look down austere-ly into the valleys; and instead I found benches in the open air littered with schoolgirls eating sandwiches.

The æsthete in me should have recoiled, shocked at this sacrilege, but I only felt relieved to find company. I promptly ordered a hot chocolate and tried to strike up a conversation with a mistress, a schoolmistress, who proved obdurate as she could only speak German and I couldn't. When they left, shambling off downhill in a direction opposite to mine, I was disconsolate.

Then, abruptly from the neighbouring restaurant yodeling broke out, and investigation proved that a group of healthy Swiss business men in ski costume were sitting solemnly round a table emitting these extraordinary noises and receiving polite and considered applause from the neighbouring tables.

I turned away and climbed toward the beginning of the down-trail down to Gstaad. The sun burned my cheek, a mild and gentle breeze dried my perspiration, a magnificent panorama of mountain scenery lay before and below me, and the weird yelling of the yodellers whispered up from the twin restaurants far behind. This, I reflected, is indeed an extraordinary country.

III

Next I had to get down, somehow, to Gstaad. I stood on a crest and the first of the trees, arranged in a series of pleasant open glades, were not far below me. The snow sloped away gently enough, but in the distance, among the trees, it dropped out of sight. Beyond I could see the floor of the valley, and the houses there looked frighteningly toy-like. Dusk had already fallen there, and a light showed, small and lonely, from a window.

What a fool I was. The snow by the shortest, steepest route I had dared myself to take was unbroken, and I was not sure where to go. If I fell, twisted an ankle, broke my neck, there would be no one to help. I was tired, my muscles were stiff and my pulse seemed to be beating insistently in my throat. In fact my knees were knocking. It was like standing on the brink of water and trying to pluck up enough courage to dive in. A plunge would do it, and it did.

I embarked trembling and swiftly achieved a sort of religious ecstasy. The snow was cold and powdery, my skis slipped through it like so much thistledown, I felt giddy at the smoothness.

Oh joy, oh rapture, this is wonderful, this is the most wonderful thing in the world. This is perfect ski-ing. . . . I am a perfect sk . . . oh hell.

My skis were catching now. The quality of the snow had changed in a few hundred feet of easy descent through winding glades, and the sun had had more effect. I could feel it tugging at the running surfaces, snatching with slipping fingers at first, and then clinging firmly so my skis dragged instead of slid and my speed was checked.

The slope was getting steeper now, dropping away, but the snow was stickier, and my skis were balling badly.

You awkward fool, you stupid idiot. You can't ski, you have no wax, you're bitched. . . . Now just try one of your damn'd jump turns.

I hurled myself about slopes steeper than anything I had ever tried before, and failed to notice them. I was

raging, exasperated, battling. I did jump turns with tons of snow clinging to my skis, on top and beneath, and when I crashed the whole mountain-side shook. I stopped and scraped my skis with a knife and went on. They would promptly ball up again and I would curse aloud.

My temperament is ill-adjusted to adversity. When nature makes things difficult I fly into a tempest and make it clear that I alone have ever to suffer so acutely. Whereas, of course, one should be as philosophical over snow down one's neck and one's wrists, over frost-nipped ears and chilled fingers, as one is over a crowded subway . . . as patient over bad snow conditions as one is in a traffic jam. The rub comes when it's your own fault, and you've forgotten to wax.

At last Providence decided I had suffered enough, I entered into the shadow cast by the opposite wall of the valley, the snow was dry and brittle again, and my skis ran smoothly. I had to climb some fences, take off my skis and walk across a muddy field and finally to walk up the road to my hotel.

I was bruised, battered and furious; but a little of the exultation of the beginning survived, and I realized that for the first afternoon in Switzerland I had chosen a tolerably difficult route and should be thankful I had not twisted an ankle and put my tour completely awry.





Chapter Thirteen

VAGABOND AT LARGE

I

ALITTLE imagination is a dangerous thing, and I paused on the brink of Switzerland after my first full day's ski-ing with all the agony of mind that attends the beginning of writing a chapter. Switzerland might be a fraction the size of the Rockies and a mere pin point on the map beside my own country; but, now that I was in its midst, it seemed formidable enough, and the number of its mountains infinite. Larger comparisons mean nothing to the individual; and the human eye is able to take in so much mountain scenery and no more. From any one viewpoint in the Alps, the cliffs seem as high, the slopes as steep, and the valleys as deep as they do from any one viewpoint in the Rockies. And, with restaurants and funiculars hidden, the Alps above timber looked exactly like the Rockies. In such settings a man ski-ing by himself can become very lonely.

A selfish temperament had given me ample experience in ski-ing alone. When I was a small boy I had started to ski, and I had built myself a small jump, and had jumped. There was no one there to applaud when I made six feet in distance the first time; no one to tell me that I was a silly little fool to build a jump so that I landed on the flat and not on a down slope; no one to pick me up and put me together again when the points of my skis caught in the lip of the jump the second time, and I was flung down on the snow below, flat on my stomach. After I had lain consciously and agonizingly dead for some minutes, and bréath completely knocked from my body, I picked up my

skis and put them carefully away. They were untouched for several years.

Dusted off some seasons later, they took me on a lone journey across the flats in a twenty-below-zero wind where I had decided to go in the throes of some adolescent turmoil, and when I returned both ears were frozen solid. Later the ears swelled, threw off many layers of skin, dripped water and handicapped my life in Ottawa Society. Again my skis lay neglected.

Then for part of one winter seven years ago I lived in Toronto and began to ski nervously on some little hills by the farm of two of the dearest and most hospitable of people, a Colonel and Mrs. Nicol, at Aurora. I did so badly that I decided I would have to do something about it; and during subsequent seasons in Montreal, I had the opportunity and incentive to continue. But it was usually alone, and because I was not yet well adjusted as a skier, or as a human being, I liked to keep on the outskirts of things, and push off on my own when I wanted a change.

That very freedom has to me always been the greatest charm to ski-ing. You need never depend on anyone else. You are as independent as a bird sailing on the air currents. You can join the flock and play on a popular slope, or you can wander where you fancy. You are your own master.

As I looked at maps in my room and thought with sinking spirits of what I hoped to do in Switzerland, little flashes of memory came to me from the winter week-ends I had spent on skis in Canada. They related not to the Rockies, on which I have dilated, but to ski-ing as commonplace as a Sunday afternoon's walk would be considered in England.

Their background was the Laurentians north of Montreal, and the rolling country west of it at the Seignior Club. They were animated by scenes in the ski-trains, long day coaches with wicker seats and skis stacked between them; crowded with people but quiet in the early morning; still more crowded and very noisy at night. Homeward bound the skis would drip on the heads of people below

if put on the luggage rack, and the thing was to put your skis in the rack over someone else. There would be laughter and singing in French and English, a few people a little drunk, and everyone looking brown and healthy.

One day I had been ski-ing with the friend who always came under protest; and the day had ended disastrously. He had been willing to ski five or ten miles and we had covered twenty. We paused for refreshment and nearly came to blows because I hadn't caught some remark, and thereafter we shouted at each other. Coca Cola was ordered, and over-proof rum introduced into it. It was an extraordinary but efficacious mixture. We clattered on skis through an icy darkness towards the station, and saw the train leaving. It paused, for no reason, and backed. The row of windows blinked and we scrambled over fences, roads and railway tracks, hoping they wouldn't move away again. They didn't until we struggled to board the train from the wrong side. Then there was a terrific clatter of falling skis and falling sticks, of banging doors, and excited shouts of mutual encouragement. We succeeded and made a hectic entrance into a car in which a deathly stillness reigned. It was full of quite nice respectable people who had been week-ending higher up the line. An old lady smiled understandingly at the two healthy young men. We bought more Coca Cola from the newsagent, flourished a gigantic flask and our outlandish brew was renewed. The old lady across the aisle looked understanding, but smiled no longer. We could hear the silence behind us, even above the uproar of the moving train.

One week-end it was raining and we were driven for shelter and solace to a French-Canadian tavern, a pub, in the small village of Piedmont. My friend could play the mouth organ, and I thought I could, so we tore off a few French-Canadian folk songs. The door at my elbow moved a little. We swept into *Il y a à la claire fontaine* and it opened a crack. I could see nothing. We handled *Vive la Canadienne* with verve, and I caught sight of a small

bright eye about two feet from the floor. We swung into *C'est l'Aviron*, and at the bottom of the crack I saw a little patent-leather shoe fastened with one small button. The little shoe was beating time to our music, and the little eye above it was peering, fascinated. These were the songs her *grand-père* played on his fiddle for the country dances. When we stopped the door closed again, and the eye and the little tapping foot were lost. An odd memory to have in Switzerland.

At home ski-ing was as get-at-able and popular as is bicycling or swimming in London; it provided a marvellous way to get outdoors in the winter-time, to cover the country, and whole families headed by train into the north. The French-Canadian habitant boys on the farms slewed about on barrel-staves and makeshift skis, with bindings made of inner tubing. They were not so good on Christys, but a Telemark could always come off.

In the heart of Montreal, on Mount Royal, the Hyde Park of the city comprising a six-hundred-foot mountain, winter sunshine brought health to an even wider range of people. There people were riding and driving in cutters, people walking and ski-ing, thousands of them, and the way they flitted down through the trees would give the average alpine skier the jitters. Here ski-ing was an everyday affair; the sun and the snow tugged at your heart. Our longest runs were not usually over a thousand feet, sometimes two, in one place down a break-neck trail three; but we were happy with a few hundreds. It was great fun.

"They ski in Quebec," I heard one Englishman say in a lecture. . . . "But you can hardly call it ski-ing. . . ." He had a queer conception of the sport.

I was to discover many like him who approached ski-ing as they would motoring, not as a means of getting about the country, but as a chance for racing. Instead of having roomy comfortable stock cars, they would have uncomfortable sport cars, noisy, and capable of speeds far greater than the roads of their country allow. With them ski-ing was the smart thing, was fashionable.

It was disconcerting to find it thus, but interesting too. The type I criticized was often able to ski far better than I could, with more nerve, more skill. I sweated to keep up with them, later in my tour, but I never lost a feeling of self-consciousness over taking it so seriously, never in the Alps lost a nostalgia for my gentle Laurentians.

My imagination, leaping to conclusions from the little I had seen of the terrain and the people, told me that I couldn't go blithely alone across country as I had at home, couldn't breeze into people and pick up acquaintances by the way. I would have to be more cautious technically, more self-sufficient and independent humanly.

You see, I had planned to ski alone over passes from one centre to another and gradually work my way from west to east. I would send my heavy luggage ahead by train and stay awhile at each place. A foretaste made me wonder if this would be possible.

I had no need to fear. Good luck was to attend my touring, my *genii* were there on duty, thoughtful people would appear from nowhere and help me. For a young man rating other people as lofty when he tended to be pretty difficult himself, I was to be spoilt, thoroughly spoilt; and the spoiling was to begin at once.

II

I had set out to traverse the Alps on, or with, my skis, and after two days in Gstaad, though a week would have scarcely given me time to do justice to the chief runs, I had the urge to be off. My next destination was Lenk in a neighbouring valley; but there were relatively few people going there; I couldn't afford a guide, the journey didn't merit one; and I was stymied.

Then my *genii* set to work. The proprietor of my hotel, M. Reichenbach, heard that I wished to go to Lenk, and he said politely in guttural French that there was nothing he would like better than to go to Lenk with me. He would return by train. What more could I ask?

We caught a postal auto-bus from the village shortly

after nine in the morning and climbed gently up-grade to Lauenen, and from there set out by way of the Truttlisberg Pass to Lenk. My host had been joined by a friend, a M. Aberli; and though their native tongue was Swiss-German, they both politely talked French so I could have a better chance at understanding. They showed me how to adjust my new plush climbing skins which I then unrolled for the first time; they told me that it wasn't far, and when it was far, and we finally stopped to rest, they told me diverting stories of how people had been killed climbing on various peaks within sight. Later M. Reichenbach managed to get hold of my rucksack for a time which, as he was fifty-nine, was a remarkably generous thing to do. I should have been properly ashamed; but I was momentarily too exhausted. To climb three thousand feet with a fairly heavy pack on one's third day in the Alps is to court trouble.

When we left Lauenen I admired the little Swiss church with its square tower and its round spire like the sharpened point of an architect's pencil. Then, when I would become appalled at the endless vista of climbing ahead of me from time to time, I'd look back over my shoulder, and there would be the church. It remained in sight for agonizing hours, and diminished in size imperceptibly. Though chalets high above it came to appear, as we climbed, to be beside it, it seemed inescapable, and I began to hate it.

Our route for the first part lay up a road used by narrow-gauged sleighs bringing wood and hay down from the mountain-sides. The sleighs were usually man-handled with high-curving runners curling up in front and a man balancing himself between them, controlling its movement by the weight of his body and the dragging of his heels. He was as exposed as an aviator out in front of the first aeroplanes, and I would have hated to come down a steep slope with a weight behind me. M. Reichenbach remarked that in one valley the wood was cut a certain length and piled on the sleds in a certain way, and in a neighbouring valley it was cut differently and piled differently. It was

very curious, he said, but it had always been that way. One valley too, he said, had stuck to its conservative old ways and though still poor was not hit by hard times, and that another valley had been over ambitious and over modern, and had suffered. That, too, was curious.

For a long time I had no eyes for anything but the heels of the skis of the man ahead of me; and when my strength flagged and I fell behind, I had only the slowly moving points of my own within vision.

Left right, left right, I started counting the steps, left right, one two, forty-one forty-two, a thousand and one, a thousand and two, left right.

Slowly now, don't rush, drag your feet, don't try to lift them, don't rush, keep at it. . . . Breathe in for two, out for two . . . in . . . out.

But I'd get frantic, pause and pant as if my heart were bursting and then rush at the slope again. My friends got farther and farther ahead. Two people who had started after us were overtaking me. I was the weak sister.

Of course my lungs and muscles were unaccustomed to the new strain; but I hadn't the brains to strike a proper rhythm with my legs and my arms and my breathing so I moved a few inches at a time even, but kept going smoothly. Later I was to learn and was to climb rhythmically and as fast as most; but it took some time, and learning was torture. A simple thing, walking uphill, but it is curious how badly a novice can do it.

My genii were good to me again when I thought I had reached the breaking-point. The two people from behind had overtaken me and disappeared, my companions were nowhere in sight. I could have wept with fatigue.

Then, Abracadabra, and there was a restaurant, a small restaurant, true, but still a restaurant. It was a farmer's chalet at the tree-line; it had a balcony facing the sun, and benches. Oh, blessed rest! My friends were there waiting for me; they had a large jug of hot chocolate for me to drink. Life began again.

There was peace for half an hour, and my system drank in the sun, my muscles undid themselves, and my stomach

closed thankfully around large cups of thick chocolate. The restaurant was only interested in travellers as a side-line, and was more pre-occupied in being a peasants' chalet and in attending to cows and the storage of hay. Consequently the milk we drank was probably fresh.

M. Aberli had been a little anxious over my dropping spirits and produced a small medicine bottle of something he called *Wunderbalm*. He said it was nourishing and stimulating and could also be used as a disinfectant; it may have also cured corns, but my French was not equal to the understanding of such subtleties. However, I politely took a couple of shots and for several dizzy moments wondered if it would undo all the good work of the chocolate, and cause me lose it more quickly than nature intended. Later we had other *petit coups* on top of the pass, my stomach reeled in renewed bewilderment, and the sky-line of mountains weaved themselves visibly into new patterns.

So there was peace, hot chocolate, *Wunderbalm*, and a little conversation about poor young men who had been killed climbing this or that peak; and then, much restored, we continued. Looking back, Lauenen and its church had the decency to disappear, the hut became the momentarily inescapable feature, and the scenery began to change as we gained height.

For a long time when you are climbing, on skis or on foot, your surroundings are static; you endure agony and nothing happens. Then as by magic you enter into another world. Ten feet higher and you are looking over a neighbouring saddle down a valley you never suspected, another move and a whole new range of mountains hoists into a hitherto empty vista, another five minutes and the countryside of trees and fields and chalets disappears and you can only see the tops of things.

It's like the difference in viewpoint between that of a child standing in a crowd of large adults, and that of a tall man looking his fellows in the face, and maybe looking down on them enough to see that some are bald and some

had dandruff on their shoulders. But that's not romantic. Say it's like passing from this world into the next, from things known into things unknown, from things human into things abstract.

At any rate you look in wonderment as each new spectacle is revealed as you begin to see over the fences of the world, and begin to see the tops of other fences and the gateways to promised lands. You become excited. You must photograph it at once, a futile thought. You must almost cry aloud for joy, and you must know the name of this peak and that. You will remember only a few and struggle to get them properly orientated on the distorted map you carry about in the back of your mind. Your glimpse of the upper world becomes more than a physical achievement. It is an emotional experience.

I want you to endure all this turmoil with me, for it happens again and again; and over each subsequent pass there is the agony of ascent, the joy of finding the unexpected restaurant, the unfolding fantasy of panoramas, the hut at the top, the run down, the second restaurant, the trail through the trees, and the new place full of new people. Switzerland is like that. The routine is common, but the components are different; but I'll not dilate on the panoramic details or the minutiae of the journey unless they differ radically, and I just want you to understand, your imagination to fill in from this background of knowledge, the geographical leaps hereafter.

The top of the Truttlisberg, *en route* from Lauenen to Lenk, differed from other passes in that there was no actual hut, restaurant or funicular at the very top of it, in that the main ridge was eroded by a series of great pot-holes, and in that to avoid them we had to descend into the head of another small valley and climb another thousand feet over a second summit. After the second run down brought us to the timber-line where there was another restaurant, there were signs of many other skiers, the slope was beaten broad and hard with tracks, and snow conditions were changing so that the surface was hard and glazed.

My two companions proceeded gingerly, but I knew better. I had a headache, my whole body complained, the great thing was to get down as fast as possible. It was an easy slope, and I headed straight where they had swung about in cautious stems.

I forgot I had steel edges to my skis, edges as sharp as dull skates that would catch unless I were neat on my feet. They had made no difference to ski-ing in soft snow, so why should they matter on hard? But they did. One ski wobbled, an outer edge caught, and I was flung on to the ground with a thump as profound as the descent of a meteor. My pack rose and jumped with both feet, as it were, on the back of my neck and held my head down against the ice. A ski came off.

I lay shattered. I lived, yes, but just. It was obvious that something must have broken, my spine probably. What a pity. What an objectionable invalid I would make. Oddly enough I could move, my headache was gone, my muscles groaned no more. I had been given such an osteopathic shaking up that I was quite restored, and rage at my ineptitude flooded back so strongly that I leapt up and continued, more cautiously, but more alertly than before.

I don't think M. Reichenbach had edges, for he skidded over the icy slopes below and took heavy falls. It's one thing to fall at my age, though even that is not the light-some adventure it's supposed to have been ten or twenty years ago, but it's another on the eve of your sixtieth birthday. It's likely to prevent one from celebrating it.

But my good friend always came up smiling, and I was much relieved when we were all three safely in the homely warmth of the Wildstrubel in Lenk and I could feed him a little of his native beer and tell him how much I admired his ski-ing and how grateful I had been for his company.

When the train departed down its spur line towards Zweisimmen, where my ski friends would change for Gstaad, the first of many such breakings of pleasant ties was made. Some, of course, had been severed in Gstaad,

but those with the two kind men who had skied with me from Lauenen to Lenk, who had carried my pack for a little, given me *Wunderbalm*, and made my first little alpine journey possible, were especially human, and I was saddened to see them go.

Chapter Fourteen

THE MISSING LENK

I

HAVE you ever arrived in fancy-dress and found the party was *not* to be in fancy-dress? We have all had or have imagined that experience, so when I confess that I, with all my belongings in a rucksack, was miserable at Lenk because I had neglected to include my dinner-jacket, you will sympathize.

In the hotel where I stayed, everyone changed. And dinner, because I had chosen to feel uncomfortable, was agony. I escaped to wander lonesomely through the village, where I glimpsed through windows of smaller hotels more groups of Anglo-Saxons bravely keeping up appearances. It was novel to go on a ski-tour with the necessities of life on one's back, and to discover that evening-dress was one of them. Thereafter I stuck to smaller hotels, unless I had my luggage and social disguise with me as was possible in several places, and had no more embarrassment. But this was another touch that differentiated the ski-ing from anything I had known before.

This naturally was the functioning of an over-active inferiority complex, and when I returned to my hotel and met the well-dressed, we got along famously. It proved that in Canada their friends were my friends, in the way it always does so one can remark on the smallness of the world.

I found them all imbued with great community spirit, and when they heard I called myself a journalist (not knowing in Canadian parlance that a journalist is a newspaperman out of work) they filled me with stories of funiculars to be, of wonderful tours and runs—all for the

love of dear old Lenk. They said, with a vehemence that made dress-shirts crinkle, that they were not a mink-coated clique like Gstaad, and that Lenk was much neglected.

That evening I was able to send off a post card: I have found the missing Lenk. And the atrocity put me to sleep early and in a good humour.

The Lenk boosters had good reason for their pride as, guide-book style, it is beautifully situated at the head of a valley, with the Wildstrubel group as a dramatic background. Given reasonable weather conditions, there are obviously plenty of ski-runs and tours in the neighbourhood. One of which would be to the sinister Plaine Morte, which from all accounts is queerly fascinating.

But I had the urge to be on, the same fever that hits a motorist and makes him unwilling to stop for a proper meal or pause to see anything. Adelboden, up and over into yet another valley, still eastward, was my next goal.

I had a letter "To Whom it May Concern" with me, stating I was a writer anxious to see the country, and it was signed by my very tall and very kind friend in London. Whenever I produced it wonders began to happen. I felt like Aladdin with his lamp, delighted at first with the effect, a little alarmed after a while at the extent of it. At Lenk this or the natural goodness of my kind host's heart inspired him to send a boy to show me the way to the Hahnenmoos Pass; and the good nature of the boy, linked with the prospect of getting a decent run back, moved him to accompany me clear to the top, a climb close on three thousand feet.

He argued that he should carry my rucksack because he wanted to get into training for his military service, due to begin the week following. He didn't succeed entirely as I was in better shape, but I compromised by letting him have my skis over the first part, until conditions merited our donning skis and skins.

He didn't enthuse over his military service, compulsory to all Swiss, but he thought the ski-ing was heaven, and he was very proud because his section of four, of which he was

the leader with rank of lance-corporal, had won some complicated sixty-kilometre race involving all kinds of ski-ing and shooting intermittently at red balloons anchored in the snow.

If you've ever tried firing a rifle under such conditions you will realize it's difficult, and if you've ever tried firing uphill you'll know how odd that can be. When I was first in Switzerland I was a confirmed marksman and tried one of their club ranges. To my surprise the target was above the horizontal, the rifle had no sling, and I did miserably. The Swiss are keen shots. William Tell set the style.

Near the timber-line there was another little restaurant run by a peasant who spent most of his time squaring and shaping timber, and at the top, Hahnenmoos, there was a full-fledged hut-hotel, swarming with skiers. They had all come up from the opposite side of the pass, and looking over the edge I saw that a "funi" cable-sled was feeding the place. The lad who guided me returned, and once more I was alone.

II

Another link was broken, my little adventure took a new turn. I was in a little stone building in the midst of a crowd of strangers. I didn't know where I would go, or what I would do. It was interesting to see what would happen, for something always did.

One alternative was to stay at the Hahnenmoos, a sensible thing to do if I were not by myself and were more experienced with alpine ski-ing. It was a comfortable place, well above timber, crowded then with skiers eating strange things produced from paper bags, and offering simple but adequate accommodation. I toyed with the idea of remaining, but the weather suddenly became overclouded, a wind arose, and great planks forming benches and tables outdoors were blown about like match-sticks. The outlook was poor.

There was a ruddy freckled-faced man in a beret pulling on his mitts, and I asked him if he were ski-ing to Adelboden. He looked at me a little dubiously, said yes, but

could I ski; and then added he'd be glad to lead the way though he was in a hurry.

There was hell a-popping as we donned our skis and headed down-grade into the teeth of a fierce wind that made speed impossible. It was a good thing because, even with goggles, I could see nothing. I kept close on the heels of my leader and finally dropped into the shelter of the trees. It involved stemming and slewing about, following every move of the skis in front and keeping no more than three yards behind them—an exciting game of follow-the-leader. Half-way down my new acquaintance asked abruptly: "Where did you learn to ski?" And at the bottom he told someone that I had only fallen once, which was only approximately correct. But it bolstered my ego a little, and I confidently set about finding accommodation in Adelboden.

I landed in the Gasthoff zum Bären, with a comfortable bed and running water in my room; and I dined not in the half-deserted *salle à manger*, but in the bar where a fascinating parade of natives floated past in various stages of illumination. There was one little man who would wander in and then wander out again, looking with glazed, but unseeing eyes, for something or someone he could never find, and later, in another pub I saw him again, still wandering. There were groups sitting about playing the unfathomable Swiss card-game of *jess*, and groups solemnly talking and drinking with their hats squarely on their heads. They were not skiers, these folk, but villagers and farmers from round about; and I enjoyed watching them hugely.

My leader down from the Hahnenmoos took considerable trouble in showing me the sights of Adelboden the following day. We went back by bus and funi to the top of the pass, but the weather was bad and we returned to Gilbach, another half-way pub, where we lunched. My friend innocently told me of an amusing American friend who had supported himself at St. Moritz by scavenging boiled eggs and untouched sandwiches from the litter left on tables in alpine huts after his friends had eaten, and

the yarn introduced me to a technique of which I had never thought. I promptly gathered in two boiled eggs, one fresh tomato, and a roll, and from that point on gained a shameful reputation for stuffing my rucksack with left-over garbage.

With the snow falling there were no long runs feasible, and I was led for a thousand feet up through open glades to return through beautiful powder snow. The light was not good, in that there were no shadows and no feeling of contour, but it was easier with the trees to show the lay of the land; and we had a fine run.

That evening I wrote a bread-and-butter letter in French to my friends in Gstaad and had it corrected by a Swiss who was working in the local *Kurverein* office at writing a notice in German and who explained my errors in English.

I wanted to ski to Kandersteg, but the route, with fresh avalanching snow, was not open; there were no parties or individuals going there; and I was advised against it. So I arranged to leave the next day by bus to Frutigen, to pick up a train there through the Lotschberg tunnel and Brigue and Visp, to visit Zermatt.

III

At Frutigen the fact that I was Canadian apparently saved me from gaol.

I had two hours to kill between the arrival of my motor bus and the departure of my train. The bus had dropped from the snow into a valley where spring seemed to have come, and I wandered aimlessly through cobbled streets and peered in shop windows. It was not a tourist's town and had a pleasant air of peace and authenticity about it.

Best of all I liked the church. It had white walls and a high-hipped roof, a square tower and a lead-pencil spire to it. It was set on a little hillock to one side of the village and was beautifully proportioned. I love old churches, architecturally, that is, and on rare occasions I am overcome by a passion to sketch. My architectural knowledge is sketchy, my sketching terrible; and when I tried to sketch architecturally the church suffered. I worked away





for some time, wandered about the place and saw how it had been switched awkwardly around inside after the Reformation, and finally headed back towards the station.

From the deep shadow of an apparently deserted side-street a policeman suddenly bounced out. He was smart and soldierly and he looked at me suspiciously. He might well. I wore dirty ski-ing slacks, a dirtier balloon silk wind-breaker, and a gaudy sash about my waist.

He said something in Swiss-German, and I understood not a word. He tried again in French, and I brightened. His French was obviously much worse than mine, and it was restoring.

What did I *faite ici*? he wanted to know.

I was then panic-stricken. If I said I had been sketching it would be life-imprisonment, for I had made the church look like a fortress and the spire like a siege gun. He would leap to conclusions.

I said I was a skier; but as there was no snow for miles he looked unimpressed. Then I murmured something about *chemin de fer* and *Bahnhof* and started towards the station.

The policeman fell into step beside me, and I felt under escort. He looked at me severely again and snatched at my sash. What was that? He wanted to know.

My national pride arose at the cue.

That, I explained, was a *ceinture fléchée Canadien*, a French-Canadian sash of the old Indian arrow pattern, not the real thing to be sure, but still a fair copy, and a colourful touch to a ski outfit.

He became very excited.

"*Canadien, eishockey*," he barked . . . "*eishockey*."

I was buffaloeed and looked it.

"*Eishockey*," he said again, and made violent swipes in the air.

Came the dawn. "Ah," I said, "ice hockey . . . hockey . . ." and I made equally violent swipes.

From that moment until the train left we played hockey. We were forward and defence. I was in goal for a bit . . .

all without understanding a word except *eisshockey* . . . all by violent pantomime.

An elderly porter joined us on the platform and mourned that some friend of his wasn't there. This other man, this friend, had played *eisshockey* too. He would have been so interested. He had actually played against Canadians. It was such a pity he was not there. The porter was disconsolate.

We all shook hands as the train left. Something quite incomprehensible and hectic had been achieved upon the strength of one word, and I retired in a blaze of glory.

It was amusing to see how we Canadians have now a new characteristic in the eyes of Europeans. For a long time they associated us with Red Indians, and we were indignant. Now they think we are all hockey players, and as their opinion of the forthright way we play hockey is not complimentary, I am not sure that we haven't cause to be equally indignant.

Europe has taken up Canadian hockey, "ice-hockey" they call it because they play a curious game in winter when they run about a field and whack a ball like the girls' boarding-schools do in Canada, which they call hockey. But they definitely think it shouldn't be played in the style apparently peculiar to its native land.

It is too violent; this body checking can't be tolerated. The Canadian players are usually great hulking fellows and could shoulder their way through European teams if given the chance. Besides, with international susceptibilities as they are, they might start a European war. The business can't be approached with the same bloodthirsty gusto that it is at home.

So the basic game is developing in Europe with rules strictly observed; and imported Canadians are being taught to behave themselves, and to play the game like little gentlemen. Though it may be hard on them it is, in all seriousness, probably very good for the game. It makes a Canadian spectator a little homesick however; and once when in a newsreel there was a glimpse of a game

in Montreal and a free-fight broke out between referees and both teams in the course of thirty seconds, I could have wept.

The spirit of the game, apart from this misunderstood element of roughness, perishes of course in being transplanted. The players may be Canadian, the play technically in England ranks close behind our best professional performances, but the electric spirit that animates the spectators is lacking. The crowds are enthusiastic enough; the sports-writer uses the right words in almost the right way; but that dynamic something that the fans put in it at home is lacking. Never, never could you reproduce the atmosphere of the Montreal Forum with ten thousand maniacs helping the Maroons and Canadiens fight it out . . . never, any more than you could re-enact Lords on the University of Toronto campus.

The English, of course, are far better showmen than is generally appreciated; and in adapting hockey they have invested it with more ritual and swank than it ever possessed in Canada. "Jesus," said one fellow-countryman fervently, "have you seen the way they sweep the ice? Why they do it to music, and a little page-boy in buttons opens the door for the snow every time the men come round . . . it's fantastic . . . it's like the changing of the guard of ushers in the Roxy's in New York. Eye-wash, of course . . . but it goes over . . ."

Though suavely and within the rules, the Europeans in other sports will do things that seem curious to us, they just can't understand a little uninhibited animosity on the ice. This was brought home to a Canadian and American team playing exhibition matches in Berlin some years ago, when they decided to stage a fight with the mistaken idea that it would build up a good gate for the succeeding nights. There is nothing the fans like at home more than a little blood, and they decided to fake this properly.

But the first pass one player made at another brought down the house. And when the fight became general, the ice was littered with spectator's beer-mugs, and they had to call the game. Mobs will practically lynch players who

get rough. I must admit it's a good thing, but, as I confess, I'm still enough of a savage Canadian at heart to enjoy seeing other people mix-in.

But this is a tangent; and my language has got out of hand. Fans I've written . . . making a pass . . . good gate. . . . The Canadian in me is coming out. It's difficult, thinking in two languages, and writing for two publics. Ski-ing in the Rockies, for instance: I spoke of "poles," whereas in the Alps I had better refer to "ski-sticks." Then a lot of English people talk of ski-ing, as shee-ing, in which case my title would sound "Eschape on Shees," to be phonetic, which would give it a short of lisp to stharboardh that would destroy the effect completely.

Wherethehellwuzzi . . . oh yes, I was yearning for lunch on the Lotschberg, and I was not to get any until I got to Brigue.

IV

To be quite honest, I had great hopes for luncheon in Brigue, for I had been told a man I was to meet there, a M. Boegli, was a great epicure; and I reflected that if I might be fed by an epicure I should have an empty stomach.

So as my train plunged into the darkness of the long tunnel, passed upon viaducts over abysses that made me more nervous than any slope I had hitherto faced on skis, and swung out high above the valley of the Rhône, the walls of my stomach sagged dismally; and as the train dropped into Brigue about three in the afternoon I was just one aching emptiness.

M. Boegli was there, a pleasant, moon-faced, little man, very efficient, very determined to give me much literature and much information. We adjourned to his office and knots in my itinerary were untied. He seemed to have a great knack at knots, though he had no conception of that into which my innards had by this time wound themselves; and it all took time.

Then he broached the subject. He knew a restaurant,

he said, just a little restaurant, a simple place; but would I like a little real local food before I left?

This was the gambit of which I had been told. I was faint with anticipation. I was so eager that my host was flattered.

We walked up the street of the village and paused before a monument to the first aviator to fly over the Simplon. Unfortunately he had been killed in landing. M. Boegli's progress up the street was triumphal. There were not many people circulating, but they all knew him and he knew them all. There were polite bows to right and to left, and I realized I was in on the ground floor.

At the little restaurant where he took me he was specially honoured. Anything, absolutely anything, was his.

We would start, he said, with cheese, local cheese, *fromage de Conches*, fried on toast with a little pepper sprinkled over it.

"*Une véritable beeftek de fromage*," said M. Boegli. And it was. It was wonderful. My stomach rejoiced.

Next came some dried ham sliced razor-thin. *Jambon sec à l'air*, he said; and cuts of tiny *saucisse de maison* and a heavy black *pain de Seigle*. The bread, he said, was baked once a month, and kept indefinitely.

As a background to this *repas de pays* was the *vin de pays*, a *vin fendant pétillant*, capped by a powerful liqueur distilled from the grape residue from the wine, called *marc du Valais*, a sort of *Schnapps*.

I then realized that Brigue was a very beautiful place, that M. Boegli was the cleverest and most magnificent of hosts and I the happiest of guests.

As some people send telegrams when they are lit, the Swiss economically run to post cards; and when several are lit together they send out a joint post card.

Boegli introduced me to this custom by penning a card of Brigue in summer to an associate in London and having me sign it. I didn't know what he said, but I signed blissfully and hoped it wasn't too disgraceful.

When by some feat of levitation I progressed down the

street into the waiting train the ascending graph of my itinerary recorded a new peak. As I wrote to my friend Bland; I went to Zermatt via Boegli, and thought Switzerland very very wonderful.

V

Zermatt deserved more time than I was able to give it, more space than I shall devote here. Also it deserved to be seen under better circumstances, for, when I arrived, the route down from Riffelalp, the last point open on the Gornergrat railway in winter, was hard and icy, and the next day it rained. It was unseasonable, unnatural; but these things happen everywhere. There was a thaw, a *Foehn*, and gloom dwelt in the valley. It rains unseasonably in the Rockies, in the Laurentians; no terrain is exempt; Zermatt need not blush for shame.

With little time ahead I chose the first day to be very active and intense; so I took a train up-grade shortly after eight and found a fellow-passenger ready to show me the down-trail to Zermatt for the return journey. It proved I had picked one of the star British racers; and I had the shattering experience of seeing his behind double up and dive over a series of precipices while I clattered and scrambled after down a trail hedged with innumerable mental hazards, flanked by trees and rocks, and paved with ice. I finally lost him entirely, took by mistake a short-cut racing-finish, and reached my hotel feeling that I had been beaten up in a riot, and that I might as well give up ski-ing.

In a defeated daze I ordered a package lunch, went up by a ten o'clock train, found a pretty girl and an agreeable doctor were tramping on up to the Gornergrat, and went along. An insole in my ski-boot wrinkled, the wind blew across the ridge we followed as if it came straight from an Arctic hell, and the long down-trail was made treacherous by shadowless light and wind-blown breakable crust. Still, it was fun, because meeting these two companions was another pleasant stroke of fate, they could both ski very well, and the girl was charming.

I stayed in one of the excellent hotels of the Seiler

dynasty and was so hospitably looked after that it was distracting. I am afraid that if I am to ski I must lead a simple life.

It was a pity the weather did not give me better view of my surroundings, more pleasure in descending the run from Riffelalp, and more opportunity to take some high alpine tours, of which there are many in the neighbourhood.

The most attractive is probably the ascent of the Monte Rosa massif, the roof of Switzerland, a monster of a mountain accessible to skiers and providing many alternative descents. But then the whole cirque of peaks as seen from the look-out at the Gornergrat suggested tours; and one would need to winter there in order to know them all.

It was interesting to see the name Tugwalder in the village, and to come upon a plaque to the memory of Whymper. To anyone interested in climbing, in the literature of climbing and of mountains, these names mean something. They relate to the first ascent of the great Matterhorn, Mont Cervin, that classic pyramid that springs ecstatically from the head of the valley at Zermatt. Now it is a common climb; there are ropes fixed over the difficult parts. But a hundred years ago it was unconquered and a deal of that dread held by man in the Middle Ages towards mountains survived regarding it. There was a city upon the top of it wherein there were evil spirits; the great cliffs were obviously unscaleable; it was to some degree deified as had been Everest by the natives caught by its spell.

Then after several unsuccessful attempts a young Englishman named Edward Whymper made a final attempt in 1865, spurred by the news of a rival party about to assail what he must have come to regard as almost his own. His party reached the summit, and on the return there was an accident. Apparently the least experienced member on the rope slipped, and he dragged the others after him. Hadow, Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas and Croz, a guide, were killed; Whymper and the two Tugwalders, guides, were saved because the rope broke.

Because it was one of the first big mountaineering

accidents, because Whympers proved in his *Scrambles in the Alps* to be a gifted writer, the names are famous; and the picture of those helpless men clawing at the steep slope and then dropping four thousand feet sheer to eternity will never be forgotten.

Arnold Lunn's *Switzerland* gives a little thumbnail sketch of the great Italian guide Carrel, who reached the summit of the mountain from the Italian side two days after the catastrophe. It tells how he died, years later, on the mountain he had hoped to conquer first. He was unwell but in charge of a party, and they were storm-bound at 13,000 feet. He led them down to safety to the easy slopes of the lower section and then he lay down and died, his task done.

There must be many other tales to be told about Zermatt, for Roman coins have been found in passes now choked with glaciers, and not long ago a peasant woman carried her child over the pass between Castor and Pollux because she thought she was to have it taken from her.

They are not easy to trace, these queer tales from the Alps; but you cannot be among the mountains without knowing that they are a land for heroes, without understanding that they can move men to risk their lives, just for the joy of being there.

Chapter Fifteen

ORACLE IN THE OBERLAND

I

IN a narrative of travel like this it is easy to write too much of travel, of journeys that get dramatically nowhere, be they on skis or in trains, of people and events, by the way, that add little to the general pattern but that are dutifully mentioned for personal reasons.

I have tried to establish in the mind of the lay reader the physical and emotional setting of ski-ing, the background of mountain scenery and the inward thought-stream of agony and afterthought, of despair and exhilaration. Consequently later I can short-cut descriptions and believe the reader will take certain elements for granted, feel with me in his imagination more readily than would be possible if he hadn't read this far. But I'm not sure what to do about railway trains. For people who don't know Switzerland, or who have never been dragged up the side of a mountain in a car that looks like a section of a staircase, it is scarcely enough to say I went from here to there. It is scarcely fair.

Unless you are an unobservantly *blasé* traveller, it will be long before you lose interest in moving through Switzerland. If you merely pass through the country in one of the crack trains you are just aware of the scenery; but if you embark, as I did, in various side trips, and jig back and forth across the map, alternately collecting and discarding luggage, the business verges on the adventurous.

Think of the varieties of transport I have used up to this point: from London a train, a boat, a train, a secondary

train, a more-secondary train. At Gstaad, the more-secondary-train, a caterpillar sled, a "funi," a postal motor bus. At Adelboden, two breeds of motor buses, and a "funi." From Frutigen, a major railway train again, so major that I felt a little shy in it after what had gone before . . . a more secondary line. . . .

And then when the time came for me to move from Zermatt to Murren it involved a reversal of the list back through Frutigen, a secondary line from Spiez to Interlaken, a more-secondary to Lauterbrunnen, a cable car up the slope to Grütschalp, and another more-secondary line along the comparative level to Murren itself.

So, you see, to say off-handedly that I went from Zermatt to Murren puts matters mildly, and though my private ranking of the railways may give the Swiss seven fits, they are only intended to suggest that the lines differed of necessity from one another in gauge, speed, gradient and appointments. They also indicate that a day's travelling in that country can, for the novice, be as exciting as a day's ski-ing.

It's a constant adventure in adjustments, adjustment to new scenes and new scenery, new altitudes, new tickets and changes of train and schedules, new wrestlings with luggage. If you are young and able-bodied, I recommend you to handle your own outfit, skis and all. It's far more fun, and much less expensive. I had heavy skis and sticks: a vast hold-all containing a typewriter and as heavy as if it contained all my sins; a rucksack and a large wardrobe case. Moving them from one train to another involved as much exercise as climbing a few thousand feet, as much expert knowledge and quick action as avoiding an oncoming avalanche.

If you have a weak stomach and enjoy, as I do, having it mildly turned, sit on the outside of the motor buses, look down from the windows of the trains, and just think what would happen to you if something slipped and you went falling, over and over and over, way down into the gorges . . . sit at the bottom of a funicular. I have a masochistic streak that gloats over prospects of this sort,

solaced by the subconscious knowledge that the Swiss systems of transport kill off fewer passengers than any others; and that they are apparently the most efficient and careful people in the world. I had run the gamut of these things ten years before; and I was comforted to find I was able to react to them all with undiminished excitement. I am always afraid of reaching the stage where I take things for granted; a dangerous stage for anyone, particularly a writer.

Rest assured that, short of being dropped by parachute into some of the resorts, there is no other way of reaching them other than by such a variety of transport. Different gradients demand different kinds of motive power. The wonder of it is that they take you, faithfully, economically and comfortably, into places where you would willingly climb laboriously on your two feet.

And thus, in a night and morning, to the Oberland.

II

I think of the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland as dominated by the Eiger, the Monch, the Jungfrau and the Oracle.

The first three are mountains: the Ogre, the Monk and the Maiden. The fourth is Arnold Lunn.

Non-skiers at this point will have to be carefully initiated. Mr. Lunn is in the English-reading ski world an oracle, The Oracle. He is a fascinating figure with horns and a tail pontificating wickedly at the top of the downward path. His tail is black with printers' ink; his horns are thick as filing hooks with dilemmas.

If there is anything that could have been done to make ski-ing known, Mr. Lunn has done it. Any alpine adventure to be taken, and he has taken it. Anything to be written about it, and he has written it. Any hell to be raised, and he has raised it. The sport would have a dreary history without him.

Human nature being human nature, and the Anglo-Saxon temperament what it is, alpine ski-ing has a remarkable and rather comic background. In Scandinavia, its

home, it was a means of locomotion since the dawn of time. It was only latterly a sport, and city-folk were probably responsible for the development of jumping. Skis of sorts had been known in European countries where there was snow, even in England, as man will instinctively fashion a boat wherever he must cross water and will logically evolve the same forms throughout the world: but they did not survive. They were not permanently introduced into the Alps until the late nineteenth century.

There conditions of snow and terrain were different to the north, and it was inevitable that a new technique would, perforce, develop. This technique, this analysis of instinctive movements, was naturally only a refinement and advancement of methods of control used by Scandinavians, but the new disciples in the Alps took their discoveries solemnly, the originators of the ski were irritatingly unimpressed, and first great schism was made.

The Germans and Austrians played about on these new-fangled contraptions, French alpinists became interested, and the Swiss caught the infection. The sporting use of skis in the Alps was to make tours and to climb peaks in winter that had not been so accessible before, and many pioneer expeditions, traverses and climbs were made by continental skiers.

And here occurred a second, minor schism. The climbers looked askance at foolhardy winter climbing, at sliding for sheer pleasure over the snow. It vulgarized their mountains. They alone knew how to worship these gods. Though skis present as good and, for the return, a better way of approaching a peak than snow-shoes, they are still not accepted; the schism continues. It is all because when one grows old one cannot change one's ways or one's ways of thinking. It's a quaint little controversy, and quite unimportant.

The battle from the outset between the *raquette* or snow-shoe and the ski is a more robust affair; and in my country, Canada, it flourishes unceasingly. Current skirmishes between varying schools of ski-ing, with the Arlberg getting most of the notoriety, and the national

jealousies involved in competition, are by-plays. The points at issue are too fine to trouble the layman: an expert Tweedle-dum skis like an expert Tweedle-dee.

The spectacle is a parable that might be translated into the terms of many other sports. John Tunis, the American tennis expert, has found sardonic comfort over the Lilliputian squabbles over the details of ping-pong versus table tennis; though he seems to think it was an essentially American comedy. It isn't: it's all too human.

The English as a whole were not amused until one of the earliest and best text-books on technique was written by Vivian Caulfield, and until he goaded his countrymen into action by saying that a Swiss had ridiculed the ski-ing of a compatriot by saying that he "skied like an Englishman." Then during the nineteen hundreds the mad English, who had been the making of tourist Switzerland in summer for two or three generations, began to be the making of it in winter; and as Mr. Lunn's father had a facile hand in the promotion of the former, so had he a trenchant one in the building up of the latter.

Arnold Lunn began to ski in an age when a single big stick held a skier upright, when he dug it frantically into the snow to stop, when hot Balaclava helmets and long woollen gloves were the thing, and women wore ski skirts. He was not, as a child, much interested or impressed with the performance, for his heart was in climbing; but he graduated naturally in time from climbing to ski-ing.

Some of his childhood was spent in Grindelwald, where his parents had a summer chalet, and glimpses of an idyllic period in his book *Mountains of Youth*, show where began the dynamic fanaticism that has fired him ever since. Mountains and everything about them fascinated him: the people who lived among them, whose languages he picked up as a child, stories about them, pictures of them from every angle.

As a small boy he played "guides" with his brother and in all seriousness must have begun his passion for rock-climbing on a thirty-foot boulder near his home. Once

he failed to reach the top by a new "route" and was reduced to wailing for his nurse. As a consequence he believes he is the only mountaineer who has ever been severely beaten for failing to complete a first ascent. He climbed in his Oxford days, founded clubs, produced books on climbing on the Alps and on ski-ing. He fell as a young man when rock-climbing in Wales and was crippled for life; but he has continued to climb and to ski, though for a long time he must have suffered agonies, and to this day must be prey to great discomfort.

Above all he has continued to write. Guide books, text-books, travel books, novels, essays, have bred beside his issues of the *Year Book* of the Ski Club of Great Britain; and there is scarcely any aspect of the sport on which he has not written, or developed strong opinions. His autobiography, if he chooses to organize it, would be wittily written, though there are many chapters to come; his biography would be amusing if candid; and he would make a first-class hero for a novel. But let the hide of a rhinoceros preserve the man who arouses his ire.

There is nothing he likes more than a full-dress debate; never does his mind work more enthusiastically than on the attack. His powers have enlivened and almost characterized British ski-ing, and the dogma at issue, and the fire with which they have been debated, have always bewildered Canadians.

I fell profoundly into the trap he keeps set when we journeyed together from Murren to Wengen. There were some nice respectable people with him, most polite to a young stranger, and they would have probably retained a passable impression of me if I could have kept my mouth shut. But temptation was too strong. Mr. Lunn made some conversational gambits in the interests of the Right; and I naturally had to go Left. I react like an Irish chameleon and go red when the land is blue, and blue when it is red.

"Mr. Lunn," I suggested tentatively, "you talk like a reactionary."

He looked pleased. He took a deep ecstatic breath.

It was tantamount to saying: Lets Have an Argument, and lo, Here was the Argument.

I made a few more awkward passes, heightening my heresies as I saw horror spreading about the party at such radicalism from an Outpost of Empire, and then I gave the floor to Mr. Lunn.

He vivisected me so neatly that it was fascinating. He cut and slashed to the accompaniment of a display of rhythmic intellectual gymnastics; and I was demolished. I soon lacked not only legs to stand on, but arms with which to fight back. Catholicism, communism, fascism and ski technique were worked in to prove my premise false and my wits woolly. I forget just how he did it, for my mind was more gripped by his technique than by his actual arguments, but he did it; and I was forced by an appointment in Wengen to retire from the train, bloody by then with the remnants of my alleged brains and brittle with the atmosphere my *lèse-majesté* had provoked off-stage.

In correspondence months later I ventured the idea that I thought a friend of mine immoral because, when he reached the level, he had been so lazy that he had taken off his skis and walked. To my Canadian way of thinking this was root-deep wickedness.

But Mr. Lunn was unimpressed. "I don't understand," he replied. "Taking off his skis was no sin . . . now if he had taken off his trousers."

The last word again.

III

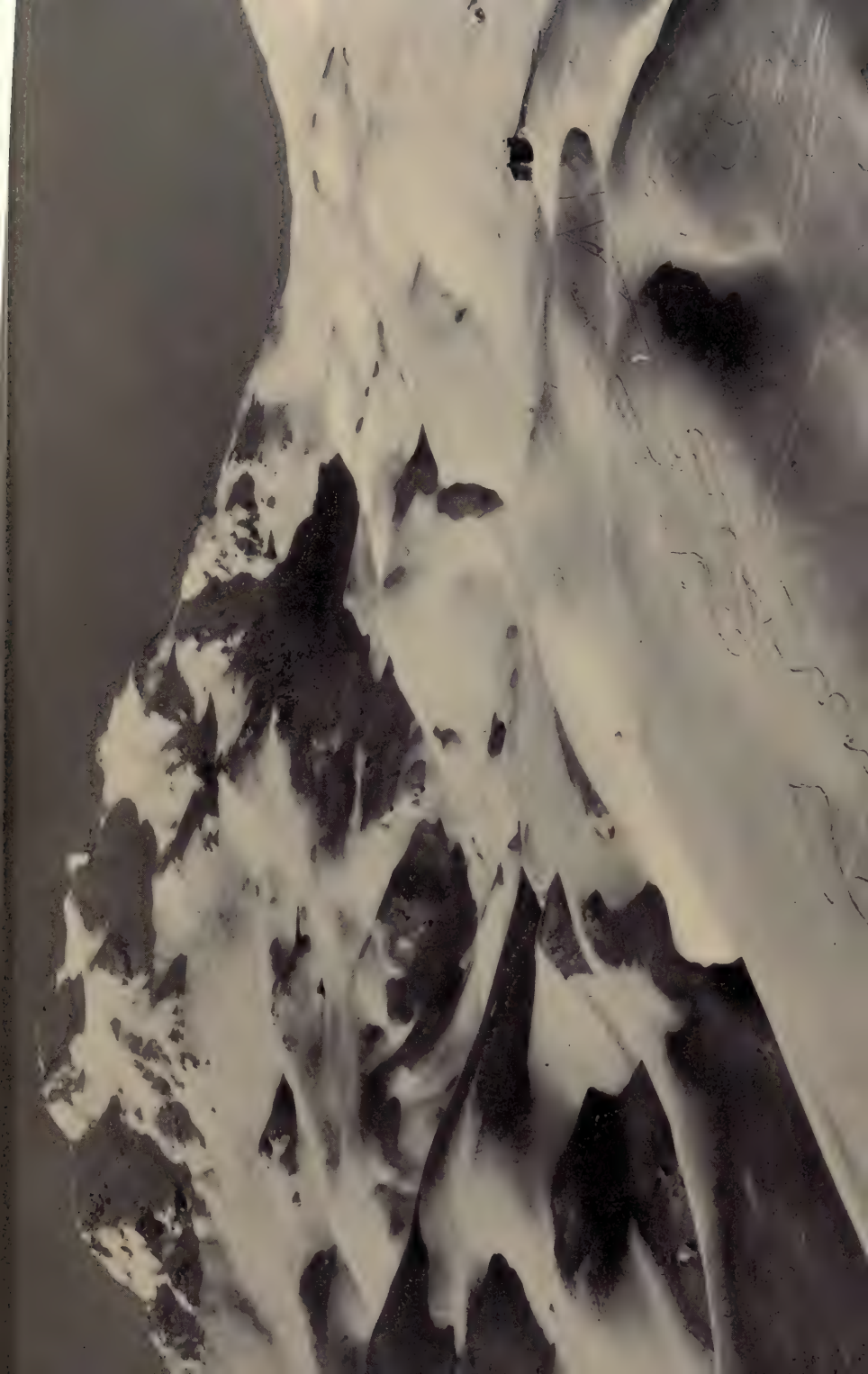
The panorama from Murren and indeed from Lauterbrunnen, Wengen, Scheidegg or Grindelwald, is titanic. There is a terrific escarpment dominated by the Eiger and the Monch, with the unseen Jungfrau as the dominant mistress of them both; and as the sun moves from one side of the pass to the other, and the shadows throw some convulsions of the mountains into relief and others into obscurity, the picture is unceasingly dramatic.

But the sun does more, for, as it strengthens, the fresh snow clinging to the highest slopes is softened, and at one point or another there is a puff of smoke, as if from an explosion, and a tiny stream seems to be pouring over a cliff and fanning over the glaciers below. Sometimes if you watch you can see this disturbance spread and spread until the whole lower surface of the glacier between the Eiger and the Monch is scored, and its tortured icefalls are hidden in a white haze.

Very pretty and abstract are these touches of animation, but if you listen some inkling of their magnitude will come to you. There is a sound of distant thunder, a sinister penetrating note that catches at the heart much as the thunder of the guns beyond the frontier of Switzerland must have done in the days when the resorts were crowded with wounded prisoners of war. Then you realize that these fairy-like puffs of smoke are in reality hundreds of tons of snow pouring thousands of feet down the cliffs, and that whole acres of glacier are being swept with white rivers of death.

Most beautiful of the glaciers, and most prone to avalanche attack, is that sweeping down between the Eiger and the Monch. Most precipitous it looks, too, from below, for its steepness is foreshortened and it seems to pile up sheerly in a series of terraces of ice and snow, scarred and broken by the tracery of crevasses. I looked on it with renewed interest and listened with fresh respect to the halting pulse of falling ice and snow when I heard that Arnold Lunn had made the first ascent of the Eiger on skis, and that his route had been by way of the great glacier.

Lunn, with two Swiss undergraduates, Amstutz and Richardet, and a porter, Amacher, joined forces one day in mid-May. Lunn made a strategical reconnaissance of the whole conformation of the glacier from a distance, and the two younger men made a preparatory tactical reconnaissance on the glacier itself. When he returned to Eiger glacier station of the famous railway that tunnels up towards the plateau by the Jungfrau, his friends had





not returned; and with some tourists he watched them anxiously.

They were then on slopes exposed to snow avalanches from above and nearing the regular track of an ice avalanche. Suddenly a sheet of ice sheered away from the cliffs and crashed in a surging cataract towards the glacier. They were in its path. Would they see their danger in time?

They did. The two men turned and slipped rapidly to one side. They had to work quickly and with precision for they were roped together, as is necessary on a dangerous glacier, and they escaped. It was a dramatic moment from which they emerged unshaken.

That night at ten, the party of four started off. They had to time their movements so as to ascend much of the glacier by the light of the moon, reach the summit before noon, and both cross and return over snow bridges in the glacier's central icefall before the day was so far advanced as to weaken the structure of the snow. The tourists who had seen the avalanche that afternoon were loud and doleful in their forebodings. It must have taken much courage to start.

The moon came out and revealed hidden beauties in the glacier. "The towering cliffs of ice were barbaric in their splendour," he writes in his *Mountains of Youth*, "but the moon lent them an air of unreality as if they were formed not of solid ice but of frozen moonbeams. . . . Three pinnacles as slender as Eastern minarets beckoned us upwards. . . ."

Towards dawn they tackled the most difficult part, a series of ice cliffs and sheer walls with yawning crevices at their feet, and, with the sureness born of long experience, they inched their way through to the open glacier above.

They took their skis to Eigerjoch, a saddle in the flank of the mountain, and there they left them, and continued on crampons to the summit, which they reached at 9.30. Their toil . . . "was a small price to pay for one of the loveliest views I have ever seen. The monarchs

of the Oberland, lording it above their great ice-streams, served as a foil to the quiet charm of the most beautiful of all conceivable valleys in the divine habit of May. From Schwendi to the Great Scheidegg, Grindelwald lay at our feet, dreaming of the summer that would hunt the last of the snows from the friendly cow alps. . . ."

They dreamed themselves awhile and at eleven began the return. There was a bad slope of ice leading to Eigerjoch, and since they had ascended the light covering of snow had softened. It was sticky and balled under the prongs of their ice crampons.

Lunn's game leg was hurting villainously and he warned his companion on the rope, Amstutz, to take every care. The other two were on another rope.

Suddenly the teeth of Lunn's crampons refused to bite, perhaps because he did not drive his aching leg down hard enough, and he slipped. But he was assured Amstutz behind would check him. But the other was caught off guard and slipped too. He shot past, vainly trying to shield his head with his hands. The two men were sliding to a brink where the slope dropped to the glacier five hundred feet below. The memories of his fall in Wales came to Lunn, and it seemed that the second fall were a continuation of the first, and that the intervening years were wiped out.

Suddenly the rope tightened and they stopped. "The rope had caught on a tiny spike of rock some three inches broad and a mere inch in height. The soft snow swept down by the rope had packed into a wrinkle of projecting limestone and had formed a pillow which just prevented the rope from being cut. That friendly little freak of rock had saved our lives."

The return over the icefall was the more dangerous because of the delay this accident caused, the snow bridge they had used in the ascent had dropped away, and the remaining snow sagged dangerously. With the aid of skis they gingerly crawled across, often breaking through and hearing icicles fall from beneath into the depths of the crevasse. But Fate was with them.

An hour after their return to Eiger glacier station a tremendous avalanche peeled off the side of the Monch and thundered down the slopes where they had passed. Had they been there nothing could have saved them.

It was quite an adventure for young skiers . . . and pretty damn good for an older man with a game leg that gave him hell.

Chapter Sixteen

AN EYE FOR THE EIGER

I

IF human emotion has any spiritual life, any ability to survive like the works of man's hands or of his brain, there must be much happiness lingering in the nooks and crannies of Switzerland. It's pleasant to think of it, clinging like a mist about the alpine flowers in summer, and flooding out like a genie released when you break the surface of the snow with your skis in winter.

There really *is* something queer about the snow, though of course it is common to all mountain snow, some lambent light or force that shines oddly in the dusk beneath the surface. It seems as if the daylight lingered there a little longer, as if it had phosphorescent qualities. You can see it if you punch a hole in the crust with your ski stick, or look down into the depths of a glacier.

Be the fantasy as it may, there must be a deal of happiness about the Oberland for, in one way or another, limitless thousands of people have been happy there. It is not always the deep content of minds at peace, but the hubbub of healthy young manhood, the happiness of exotic, vigorous lads, the ecstatic delirium of the racer. An enviable sort of happiness.

The laughter of Antony, Viscount Knebworth, who skied so often at Murren, and who raced hilariously down the many trails from the Scheidegg, must be the stuff of which this dream is partly made. "Perhaps his laugh was his richest part," wrote J. M. Barrie of him, in his foreword to *Antony*. "I have never heard a more glorious

laugh in man or boy; it overfilled him: I think he laughed last in his last moment, or one prefers to believe that his laugh accompanies him still."

Once, from Murren, Antony wrote his mother: "I can't write. I am too happy. Life is divine. Sun and ski-ing, it's all too perfect. . . . Think of us both laughing, singing and ski-ing in the sun. Six years old and wild with joy. . . . Oh, but life is good."

When the fever of downhill racing caught him he described the hectic journeys back and forth between the stations on the mountain railways . . . "a new spirit altogether which makes it all wonderful. Instead of plugging seriously along with earnest old men loaded with rucksacks and hats and coats and skis and luncheon and tea, etc., you just dash off suddenly with a friend and a pair of skis, and go the whole day, just roaring with laughter, and like hell all the way—arrive at your destination—find you've got no money, so race the train home and beat it! It's all so new and so wonderful that you must understand I feel excited about it. . . ." It was a gorgeous, youthful excitement for . . . "the best skier in Switzerland is now an attractive and reckless young man of twenty instead of a reliable and cautious old one of thirty-five or so. . . ." But has the downhill spirit ever been revealed more charmingly?

II

My own reaction to the neighbourhood was restrained by a little of that caution that creeps into the rheumatic frame of a skier closer to thirty-five than twenty, by a frank dismay of the new heights and speeds with which I had to contend, and by the aloofness that is both the shield and the burden of anyone choosing to travel alone and to write about it. My typewriter was with me, I had an article to write for *Mayfair* in Canada, notes to make for another for *Country Life* in the States, and pages of atmosphere to preserve whenever I had the energy.

It was all very difficult. I would come back tired and a little bruised from racketing about the down trails all

day, and the last dregs of my vitality would ebb through my fingers when they touched the keyboard. Moreover, there was a woman in the next room who whistled continuously, and I had to waste time striking up an acquaintance in an effort to stop it. But it did no good, for it was a nervous affliction and she was inhibited anyway.

The days divide themselves off into a series of little pictures.

There was one at Murren when I was taken skiing by Michel, the Kurdirector, his charming wife and a large spotted dog. They both skied superbly, he dancing down with the most foot-together rhythmic style I had so far seen; but best of all was the dog. It raced about, did *gelandesprungs*, snow-plough stops, and *sitzmarks* with terrific abandon and left us far behind.

But the great wall of mountains opposite Murren fascinated me (its site is almost absurdly dramatic and difficult to become accustomed to) and occasional glances back at the downhill courses used in Kandahar and Fis races completed my conviction of insignificance. The Fis, pronounced *fisssss*, like you think you go when you *schusssssss* down through the snow, means *Federation Internationale de Ski*: and Kandahar means everything that is pukka in downhill racing.

Neither the view, the sight of those terrific downhill runs, heightened of course by foreshortening but still terrific, or the suavity of my companion's skiing put me at ease; and I left for Wengen feeling that here was a nut I had better not try and crack until I was much tougher.

At Wengen, the home of the much abused club with the provocative title of Downhill Only, I learned to battle down the hard trails, beaten grim by hundreds of clattering skis, and soon found myself timing my descents, racing to catch trains, and looking with equal disdain upon those who could ski faster than I, and upon those who couldn't.

I found here a breed of skier who sensibly set out to pack excitement into his holiday, and though I likened

it to specializing in riding bicycles only downhill on dangerous roads, there was no other way they could have got so much downhill ski-ing in so short a time. And if they wanted to slide downhill and only had a few days in the year to do it, why criticise them for it? I for one enjoyed it all hugely. Some Wengenites might be awkward in untracked snow, slow and bored on the level and loath to tour or climb; but they were having fun, which was the main thing. The only trouble was that they had to spend such a long time on trains and waiting for trains, and proportionately little on skis.

But here you see the skier in me beginning to moralize, beginning to wax philosophical on technicalities I think sinful at heart—I, who have had to ski in far less interesting surroundings; I, who am as jealous as hell—and you must put a stop to it.

I became known as "Canada" to a cheery group who disappeared all too soon for Davos and was given several free drinks on the strength of diving for a sliding ski that had come loose from the foot of a man who had fallen ahead of me. It was headed down-grade for a thousand foot slither into oblivion when I made a flying tackle and bravely pressed the outline of its Kandahar binding into my tender stomach, stopping the thing by falling on top of it. Clumsy but effective.

With one little thing or another I was momentarily uppish. One day I saw black lice crawling up the rounded summit of the Lauberhorn, a sensually smooth summit north of the Scheidegg, and I wondered at the bravery of man. And then another sunny day I plodded to the top with my skis myself, and ran down with only one skidding fall in about three minutes over snow it had taken well over an hour to climb.

I was as pleased as a small dog that had frightened away a larger dog by barking; and when a girl I knew proposed to join me on a trip to the Mannlichen Hotel I was secretly put out. These women delay one. We men must be independent of clinging vines somewhere, you know.

But could that English wench ski? She slipped over

the lip of the steepest take-off at Eigerletscher and traversed as straight as a ramrod. I plunged and sprawled. She was waiting for me below. Thereafter I could tell the steepness of a slope by the speed with which her trim figure diminished down-grade, erect and unswerving, and by the rate at which her trousers whipped in the wind. It put me properly in my place.

I began also to get mildly inhibited, what with so many healthy hearty people about, and I went through an Irish-Canadian stage of deciding they were all aggressively Anglo-Saxon. There was one group in particular that had me twitching with embarrassment.

There had been a little mutual picking-up on the train between an Irish girl and myself; a nice round-faced little body she was, with blue eyes and an amusing tongue to her; and when she took me to the table at noon where her brother and some friends were picnicking, I suddenly was aware of tension.

I had not hitherto encountered the jaundiced eye of a brother for the pick-ups of a sister; but his stony silence and the tacit rudeness of his companions in not attempting to break the ice nearly froze my stomach. There was little said, no amenities, no pepper, salt or vinegar offered, and I struggled miserably with the man on my right. No one was offering or sharing anything with me, so I tried him. He warmed at once and took some hot chocolate.

He proved to be a fellow-scavenger. I told him how I always kept an extra breakfast roll to add to my package lunch, and he countered with the fact that he always kept the hard boiled eggs from the package lunches, peeled them the next morning, heated them in his shaving water, and took them, naked as it were, but warmed and edible, down to breakfast with him. He was very solemn and very human and very English. But the others, I was sure, were *typically* English. They weren't, it proved. They were Irish and Canadian. I let that be a lesson to me.

III

These little happenings were crowded into my second week in the Alps and punctuated my exploration of trails as well known to thousands of skiers as Bond Street and Piccadilly. The one chance where I might really escape into terrain known to one skier in a thousand was from the top of Jungfrau railway, and down the Great Aletsch glacier eastward towards Munster and the Furka. The tour is easy enough now for you start from a comfortable hotel, about the highest in the world I think, and link up with well-stocked huts over a route varying between ten and twelve thousand feet; but it can be difficult and dangerous for all that, and parties can no more start out in a snowstorm or when avalanches are likely than transatlantic flights can be made into the teeth of a blizzard. These dangers were to thwart my plans, but as everything was new and as the setting was extraordinary, I think the very thwarting worth recording.

It all began with Boegli. He, you may remember, was the jolly friend who fed me a *repas du pays* and *vin du pays* at Brigue. I returned through Brigue from Zermatt, but failed to relate how another such meal was mine; how we dined in state in another restaurant; how Monsieur *le propriétaire*, who badly needed a shave, stayed anxiously by to see that everything was just as it should be; how his daughter was one of the pretty waitresses, and his wife the cook; or how we shook hands with Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle as we left and said, with little blarney, that it was the finest dinner we had ever eaten.

I neglected, too, to relate how I met there Doctor Schneller, an engineer in charge of the Furka Oberalp railway, and Imseng, a local *coiffeur*, who was one of the star ski guides of the district. We made plans, before dinner, pored over maps and arranged to forgoather when weather permitted at the Jungfrau, for a proper high alpine tour.

The weather for the next few days was unreliable.

One day there would be sunshine, the next snow at Scheidegg and rain at Wengen and Grindelwald. Ski-ing down through the range of climate was curious, and there would be soft fresh snow at the top and glare ice, running water and open ground at the bottom. Then one afternoon I heard that Schneller and Imseng were coming. Apparently it had cleared at Brigue, and they hoped it would clear likewise at the Jungfrau. It didn't.

I picked them up at the train and made some trial runs through driving snow during the morning from Scheidegg. We took the train up to the top of the Jungfrau spur line that afternoon, and planned to start off on our skis the next morning if the weather cleared. I must say my heart sank to my boots and a blue funk spread out like a disease from the pit of my stomach as I watched the weather and thought of ski-ing through it into the Unknown; and my most bitter disappointment was mingled with a little sub-conscious relief when things had to be called off.

The adventure began on the electric train that passed its customary halt at Eigergletscher station and took us a little higher to the mouth of a tunnel. But I must fix the setting of this unique railway in your mind.

It is a spur line from the mountain railway joining the valleys of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald over the Scheidegg, a pass in the ridge; it begins at 6,772 feet, and ends at 11,400 feet. It is in the open for a little and then disappears into a tunnel nearly five miles long, and there it ends—in its tunnel. It bores into the solid rock of the Eiger, from just above Eigergletscher station, slants steadily upwards, takes a steeper pitch at one point, changes direction to follow the conformation of the mountain, and ends subterraneously at the station and hotel of Jungfrauoch. It is unique for it serves no normally useful purpose. It is for tourists, sightseeing traffic only; and in winter, with the exception of the short lower section used by skiers, there is little enough of this.

The first station in the long tunnel is Eigerwand, a

side passage in the rock leading to a hole in the north face of the Eiger; and a curious story about it and about the menacing cliff it pierced was told me by a member of the Swiss Alpine Club at Wengen.

The north and dramatically most awful face of the Ogre—the Eiger—has been a challenge for years to stunt alpinists, to the breed that wants to fling itself against the impossible, to conquer the unconquerable. It is difficult not only because it is almost five thousand feet sheer and rises to over twelve thousand above sea-level, but because in the daytime the sun melts the snow and ice upon the face of the cliff, and there is a continuous shower of little streams of water, falling ice and broken rock. Climbers may escape unhurt from falling debris by day, but they will be soaked; and with darkness high up the temperature falls, their clothing will freeze, and they will be helpless against the cold.

The north face is notorious, the local guides will very sensibly have none of it, and would-be suicides are grimly advised to leave funds to pay for search parties and funeral expenses before their departure. Several times guides who have done their best to dissuade have risked their own lives later in a bid to save. And for professional climbers with wives and families this has been far braver than the fanaticism that fired the fool-hardy. A guide is trained to climb safely as a commercial pilot is trained to fly safely under all conditions. They can have scant sympathy for those anxious to risk not only their own but many other lives. The opening in the cliff at Eigerwand has been used in attempts to reach stranded men, but usually it has been of little avail.

The Germans seemed to look upon the Eiger as their especial enemy and there are apparently many good Aryans permanently established on the North Face. They usually managed to perish melodramatically, inching their way up the icy cliffs, pitching a tiny tent upon a narrow ledge, and then freezing to death in it. Hundreds of telescopes would watch them from below, an aeroplane

would circle dangerously close to the cliff and take photographs, but the outside world would be helpless. They would just sit there, motionless, dead.

One lad was found hanging on the end of a rope by guides who worked their way out from Eigerwand. He was suspended over the abyss and was able to speak a little. They tried to reach him, but it was hopeless. Soon he died before their eyes. He was left there, and the corpse was icicle-hung and piteous. Later friends came and cut it down, and it fell and was smashed to pieces. His companions were never found.

Of course every flank and shoulder of the Eiger, and indeed of every great mountain, has dramatic associations. The glacier between the Eiger and the Monch suggests the story of Lunn's party already told, and a little research into alpine journals would reveal many other yarns of climbs and ski runs, successful and fatal.

But to the traveller, the railway to Jungfraujoch is characterized by no such macabre atmosphere, but is, rather, something unique, completely unreal. To climb through a mountain from seven thousand odd to eleven thousand odd feet is curious enough; but to make the trip in winter is an experience in itself.

With my two friends, Dr. Schneller, a little giant of a man who insisted on carrying armfuls of skis and doing enough work for two men when we changed trains, and Imseng, the guide, I sat expectantly in the little train as it ground slowly up the track from Eigergletscher station. There was a snow-plough pushed ahead of the train and it seemed to buck a good foot of snow as it climbed up-grade without the slightest difficulty.

The wind battled against us and snow swirled past the windows. There was a vertical wall of snow against the mountain, and sometimes there would be another on the opposite side where the line had to cut through snow that had slid across the track.

Then we stopped, white walls enclosed the train, and peering out I could see that the mouth of a tunnel blocked by great wooden doors lay ahead. We had to

get out, move our skis and rucksacks into another train, and dive through a small door in the barrier to do it.

"Attention des avalanches," shouted an elderly gnarled little guard who stood under the shelter of the tunnel mouth, and to prove his point snow spilled down on the track before him.

There were edgings along between the snow and the train; a scurry across the few yards threatened by avalanches, and then, as if I were being shot through a small door in a compressed air lock . . . nothing.

I had come through the opening like a human cannon-ball and stood in complete darkness. Behind me there was a whining and moaning where the wind blasted with terrific pressure against the great doors. It was cold and eerie, and I couldn't see where to turn. Then the little door through which I had come opened again, a figure carrying skis bolted through it, the howl of the wind changed to a prolonged blast, and a swirl of snow illuminated by the moment of daylight sprayed deep into the tunnel.

I could then see the ragged walls sloping surprisingly upward, and, a few hundred feet away, the three eyes of an electric locomotive. It inched down towards us, we climbed a little on foot, clung to the jagged wall and finally managed to get our skis and belongings into a carriage beyond.

From then on we might have been in another world, a Wellsian world. There was nothing to be seen but the broken edges of the rocky walls and the shining rails and central rack of the railway climbing steeply upward.

The passage leading to Eigerwand was passed. Then the tunnel widened, and in the silence and darkness we found another train awaiting us. It was cold and dark, lonely in some curious way, and it seemed a pity that it should never see the light of day. We changed once more at this queer junction carved from the heart of the mountain and climbed still more steeply.

It was so steep that, standing upright, one looked vertically down at the floor a good four feet in front

of one's feet. I reflected that if I spat and measured the distance between the spot where it fell and my centre of gravity, that I might estimate the angle at which we ascended. But that would have been complicated, and most annoying to the Swiss. They are a tidy people and post notices about not spitting and about throwing *aucun objects* out of the windows in four languages.

At the top, to complete the feeling of unreality, there was an hotel, again largely hewn from the solid rock. A passage led from the station, which was nothing more than the dead-end of the tunnel, and opened into a broad room with a stone floor. A long window overlooked the great Aletsch glacier, one of the most spectacular views in the world. From it, when we arrived, there was to be seen: absolutely nothing.

Nothing but whirling snow, white, ceaselessly falling or eddying, nothing else. And it was like that during the twenty-four hours we were there.

The comely little maid who showed me the well-designed and furnished rooms was attractive enough, but I reflected that there were some things that should be eliminated from the mind at eleven thousand four hundred feet, and as I climbed the stairs my heart pumped heavily.

We slept that night on the floor, my two friends and I. Prices were high at that altitude, and it proved if we rented mattresses and blankets it was considerably less expensive than if we slept in beds. As we proposed to spend the next night or so in huts, it seemed sensible to start roughing it at once.

I slept, or rather I tried to sleep, as the wind wailed the laments of hell outside, gusts of snow blew in through the single small pane open in the double window, and the air, electrically heated, became so parched and hot that it dried my lungs and cracked my lips. I lay, tense and uncomfortable for half the night, and came to many melancholy conclusions. Imseng snored occasionally. Schneller was as quiet as a mouse.

The morning dawned hopeless. It would be suicide to

venture down across the glacier in such oblivion, and if the weather cleared, for a long time after the slopes would be sloughing off the fresh snow, and there would be the certain risk of avalanches.

So it remained to kill time until the one afternoon train. Little happened. An impassive Japanese came up by the morning train, looked impassively at the white wall of swirling snow before the window and promptly went to sleep, and as impassively accompanied us back in the afternoon. It proved he was in the grip of some terrific itinerary devised by a travel agency, and that he was covering every inch of it, doggedly and impassively.

We made some explorations of strange galleries or passages under construction in the rock. They connected with the face of the cliff above the glacier, from where we were to have taken off on our skis at the beginning of our run, and gave entrance to a meteorological observatory. We asked whether we might see the place, but were told on the phone that we would need a card from the Director, whose office was in Bern.

There is an institute and meteorological observation post cut in the rock by the station where the effect of altitude on various phases of science is studied, and where doctors and scientists of all nations are accommodated to carry on private research. It made up an oddly detached community high above the rest of the world.

Then we slid in the train down through the cold and the darkness, put on our skis at the mouth of the tunnel, and were forced by dangerous snow conditions, for it was still snowing heavily, to ski down the railway track. I took one of my worst falls of my tour while sliding down between the toothed rack in the middle and the rail, and struggled to extricate a ski that was stuck straight into a hard wall of snow while I pictured the rotary plough coming round the corner and cutting me to mince-meat.

From the Scheidegg we rushed down-grade for Grindelwald, and just caught an out-bound train for Interlaken. At Spiez we parted, most reluctantly on my part, for my

two companions—*Tres bonnes camarades*, M. Boegli had rightly called them—had become very pleasant to me, despite barriers of French which none of us spoke with fluency; and I began once more my lonely journeyings through Switzerland.





Chapter Seventeen

ON TO THE OBERALP

I

IT may have been a line in a letter from my mother to the effect that: your ski-ing sounds frantically strenuous, but I suppose you are enjoying it. It may have been some premonition of further disaster, or even subconscious guilt. But during the night that I attempted to sleep at a high altitude a most 'orrible strain of realism wormed into my mind.

It was that my ski-ing was simply an elaborate evasion of the issues of life, a mental sedative, an escape. I was later able to comfort myself with the illusion that it was physically beneficial, that I needed the holiday, and that I was really managing to carry myself on the strength of my writing. My excuses were sound, but the original, basic suspicion remained unshaken: and to get company in my misery—and to hedge further—I managed to broaden the charge to include most of humanity.

I wrote one of those brilliant little essays that stand clearly out in the mind of a writer when he lies awake, and that he's usually wise enough to leave there. It mourned, as if it were the first to do so, over the way most people orientate their lives to escape themselves, believing their conscience or their subconscious impossible to face, and how they hurry restlessly from one routine of social life to another, and from one sport to another.

They would say they did it all because they were bored, oh, terribly bored; and then poetic justice would make them still more bored with the pleasures in which they sought relief. They wouldn't be honest enough to face it out and discover they secretly thought themselves lice,

and that they were avoiding human responsibilities, avoiding using their brains and creative talents, avoiding the risk of finding themselves fourth-raters in actual living. This most obviously explained the bad manners of the genuinely well-to-do: it was their only way of making an impression.

But all this applied to a relatively small class and to a still smaller group among the English, who for all their edgy qualities accept socially and financially more public responsibility than the rich on my own continent; and I had to turn to smaller and more numerous fry.

People spend their lives seeking desperately to find something at which they can be expert. They may fail at normal affairs, but sports are a delightful alternative. Given supremacy in anything, no matter how small or irrelevant, and human nature can face the world with confidence. Stardom in golf or ping-pong, ski-ing or darts gives just the needed protective swagger. It is the triumph of matter over mind, of the physical over the spiritual. It explains competitive ski-ing and competitive sport . . . and it explains why timorous souls like mine avoid races because they don't want to risk bruising their vanity with additional defeats.

I decided during my hours of torment that this behaviour was essentially masculine, and that women had seen through it long ago. I am a feminist with lessening illusions. I think women reason objectively, and behave objectively and without scruple; but I have no doubt that, whenever they pause to look, they see men for the tribe of conceited children that they are. It must be frightening to know they have to depend on them.

You can see this work with women in sports. When they threaten their femininity by competing physically and against men, it is because they have a strain of masculine vanity: it is their scheme to escape. If you are discerning you can suspect in the intelligent a latent feeling of silliness over their own behaviour, mingled with a diabolical glee in mastering man on his own playground.

Not only sports, but going far far away and suffering

in deserts, of ice or sand, are likewise escapes. But the latter are more dangerous, for they give a man time to think. He can build up a busy physical life, with cooking, climbing, taking scientific observations, or playing with a camera and light meter, but sooner or later Thought will intrude itself, and it will be unpleasant and inescapable. It will suggest rudely that he is enduring all this discomfort because it gives him a feeling of being mildly martyred, and because, no matter how uncomfortable, it is infinitely better than having to face the issues and problems of living as a member of a crowded and highly organized society. It is easier to become adjusted to nature in the wide open spaces than to human nature in the congested ones. It is an admission of subtle frustration.

The frustrated touch is, I think, somewhat frivolously obvious in the mountaineer. He is often a small, mild little fellow who wants privately to feel a giant. There's an erotic strain in his writing, which has been formalized along violently sexual lines.

You are not content to climb, you must attack. You never study or reconnoitre, you woo and make advances. A mountain is never difficult, it resists passionately, it is a cold lover, it struggles to remain inviolate.

The crisis approaches. Like a good climber you summon up your most ardent reserves, you meet with guile the shy blandishments of the heights, you assault, you storm, you embrace the last cliffs in hungry fingers.

And then, at last, you win through. In ecstasy you stand upon the peak; a virgin ascent is yours.

Of course, what satisfaction, to carry this time-honoured metaphor to an unblushing conclusion, the maidenly mountain can get out of such Lilliputian performances is a question. It is all ambitious but inadequate.

II

But all this realism didn't save me from trouble.

By geographical circumlocution equal to any of the round-about mental processes that depressed me, I reached

Andermatt. Had luck been with me I would have come on skis from Jungfrauoch by way of Munster, Gletsch and Furka Pass; but as the latter is a dangerous point in winter and kills off a postman or railway patrol every season or so, perhaps it is as well I was checked at the outset.

When I arrived it was snowing, and for days it snowed. It snowed as much, someone remarked, as it does in a Russian novel. I would go up in the little train that puffed up grade into obscurity, and I would come down in obscurity, not knowing where I was going or how fast.

My first run down from Natschen, the point on the Oberalp Pass where the little train stopped and reversed, was memorable. I asked the advice of a pretty Swiss as to a good route, and she said I might follow her party, if I choose. It proved her friends were professionals and had taken the Telegraph Pole Route. This was very steep, the snow was deep and difficult and badly battered on the worst part, the light was flat and shadowless, and my nerve was poor. The adventure left me a little shaken.

In the bar of one of the hotels that night I saw an English girl that I knew. Or did I know her? The face was familiar; but then many faces are, in bars. So I blushed and disappeared when she raised an enquiring eyebrow.

When I found myself beside her in the crowded train to Natschen the next day I was interested but still embarrassed.

"Lovely weather," I remarked with a nervousness that ignored the blizzard driving past the windows.

She dismissed the weather. "I thought you hadn't remembered who I was," she said crisply.

The only thing was to be brave. "I hadn't," I confessed. And the embarrassing fact was disclosed by a little adroit conversation on her part that I not only hadn't but didn't.

There was a hard glint in a pair of nice blue eyes. More adroit conversation put me straight. I had been a guest at her house for dinner three weeks before, and that I had committed one of those stupid acts of forgetfulness that make one writhe for ever after. A woman in ski

trousers scarcely resembles a woman in evening dress; but not to spot the resemblance is fatal.

A man at that moment was working his way through the train carrying an armful of squares of cloth with large numbers on them.

"The Herr would like to enter," she called suddenly, and with a triumphant gesture she snatched a pair of numbers.

"Enter what?" I asked in panic. "I never enter." But there was to be no evasion.

There was a downhill race organized by the *Kurverein* of Andermatt down from Natschen. Everyone went in, you know. No, she wasn't herself: she would watch me. I didn't know the course, had never been over it? No matter, it would be clearly marked.

I stepped from the train into a blizzard at Natschen and began shivering at once. First the numbers had to be tied about me like a bib.

It was very funny. My number was thirteen. Oh, it was very funny.

Then with cold fingers I finished lacing gaiters, strapped a pair of Amstutz springs about my ankles, gadgets that gave more control of the heel of the ski with less risk than the down-pull modern bindings.

My feet were a complicated business, but not half so complicated as my head. I decided that as it was snowing I should be well protected. First I put on a pair of dark glasses so I could see changes in contour, then I put on a headband to keep my ears warm, then a celluloid peaked visor as a shield against the driving snow, and, as a final binding touch, my parka hood to keep the snow from blowing down my neck. It was a ridiculous arrangement, far more than I used normally, and Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum between them were never so tricked out.

Then I had to wait for my turn. It was long in coming and the skiers were in numerical order pushed off at minute intervals into the Whiteness. I had cold feet, I was perished and when my time came to start I wished the girl had stayed so I could tell her how pleased I was.

I left in fine style. *Schuss*, swing round a corner and another *schuss*. Where does the slope go from here? Oh help, help, help.

And naturally I fell. It was an easy fall for the snow was soft and plentiful, but I could see nothing. The snow was now packed under the dark glasses, the visor, the headband and the parka. I removed the lot with a gesture and continued.

More slopes and terraces, more speed and agony and hope. The flagged trail dropped into a bowl, I could hear people about me. Suddenly the slope was resisting me. I was shooting up the opposite side.

Too late, another fall. This time a ski came off, and the heel spring gave it a nice flick out of reach.

Is there anything sillier than a man hopping frantically on one ski as he tries to pursue the other? There isn't. There were murmurs of sympathy and of laughter.

I was jittering with rage when, as a final gesture, one cold hand dropped a ski stick. Go back and get it. You fool! You . . .! You . . .! So I shambled a few yards backwards along a narrow sloping path and recovered the stick.

More slopes, more turns. Crowds of little Swiss soldiers being taught to ski directly in my path. The Finishing flag. *Schuss*, and it's all over.

The Pretty Girl met me at the bottom.

"I saw you fall," she said comfortingly, ". . . everyone fell there, simply everyone . . ."

"How jolly," I said. "How frightfully jolly. . . . I wish they had all broken their necks."

And as a sort of slap-stick curtain on the tragedy, I thereat sat down in the snow again, and sprained my thumb.

One thing had been of course achieved. The Pretty Girl had made sure that I would remember her for ever afterwards.

III

Andermatt seemed to be a most pleasantly self-contained and isolated resort. It was at the end of a spur line from

Göschenen and above the St. Gottard tunnel which passed far beneath, and when it snowed very heavily there would be some doubt that the daily trains would go through. It added a pleasant touch of uncertainty to life and proved the hotels ran little risk of having to accommodate guests free if, in the case of those who took out insurance for 2s. 6d., there lacked enough snow any day to ski up to the very doors of their hotel.

I stayed at the Drei Königen because it had a gay gilt sign of Three Kings before the door, because the doors were low and the rooms panelled and the prices moderate, and because it was more attractively and legitimately Swiss than anything else I could find in the village. I read several charmingly written chapters of Smythe's *Alpine Journey*, proudly kept by M. Meyer, the proprietor, because his hotel was mentioned therein, and realized how tame my travels were compared with the solo wanderings of this famous mountaineer. But then that is the very point of my book. My trip or one like it is within the powers of any capable and careful skier; I was embarked on what we would call at home a ski-hike, not a lone high-alpine tour.

I found more than the Drei Königen picturesque in Andermatt. There was a little church dating from the ninth century, and because I have a passion for old churches I had to secure the key from the little restaurant by the barracks below it, and explore the tower. An English friend wandered over with a similar idea in mind, and we climbed up the winding stairs like small boys in a haunted house and were desperately nervous lest we yank the bell-cord that hung conveniently by the stair and alarm the neighbourhood. The old hand-hewn wooden beams forming the internal structure of the tower were most interesting, showing how the exterior line of the spire was changed from being four-sided into being octagonal, and circular, how the taper was done, and how the spread, bell-cast or lilt to the eaves was designed. It was barren and neglected, that little church, a queer "sight" to sandwich into a ski-tour, but it was diverting. The

historic background to the hospice and pass of St. Gottard, the bloody battles associated with the Schollen Gorge, and the legend of the Devil's Bridge seemed less remote thereafter.

The latter has about it the sort of yarn guaranteed to survive in tourist literature for generations to come. The Devil undertook to build the first bridge on the understanding that the first living creature to go across it should be his, body and soul (how many folk-tales are based on that exciting if vague premise), and the natives outwitted him, after the bridge had been thrown up over-night, by sending a dog across.

A descendant of this dog sold to the devil turned up one night when I was in Andermatt's one night club.

The village is the last place in the world to find "night life"; but, in a low-ceilinged basement, with a tiny orchestra, a tiny floor, and tiny tables crowded about the walls, they managed to do very well. And as the beer was cheap, the crowd democratic, the atmosphere thick and the music amusing, I enjoyed it hugely, was most grateful to my hosts, and was very sad when the dog came in and turned us all out.

It was a police-dog, a perfect bitch, and she accompanied the local *gendarme* and stood in the middle of the floor, dignified and a little bewildered. Apparently there was some early closing rule on Saturday nights, and her master was bound to have it observed. He did it all very gently and discreetly.

He would go up to one table, bow and salute and ask the people to leave, and then he would stand patiently while they wasted their blandishments on him—and left. Then he would move on to the next table. It took time, but it was effective; and maybe the big police-dog in the middle of the room made it a little easier for him. She didn't bark, but she might bite.

It was very late that night, but luckily I was able to get back into my hotel because one of the local maids was being kissed by one of the local corporals on the doorstep, and she had the key.

IV

Andermatt was infested with White Hares and they all wore skis. They were members of an English Ski Club, and were getting a lot of fun out of their holiday. This was thanks to good organization. The club attended to the transportation, accommodation, ski-instruction, ski-touring competitions and social entertainment of its members of all degrees of ability and of all ages. From what I could see, it made an excellent job of it.

I saw several varieties of ski clubs in Switzerland, and this struck me as being one of the most serviceable to ordinary skiers. The club situation deserves a word.

For English-speaking skiers there is one paramount organization, the Ski Club of Great Britain. Members representing the club are posted at all the chief ski centres in Switzerland and Austria, and arrange for the testing of members anxious to discover whether their ski-ing conforms to certain accepted standards, and who are often most kind and helpful in making local contacts.

To spend time in learning to pass tests, to try and to fail, and finally to succeed can seem an unnecessary trouble; but it's well worth while. It's not only pandering to one's Boy-Scout-badge complex, not gaining something to swank about, it's really learning to ski better. It means you must learn new turns, improve old ones. The danger, of course, is that tests must be adapted to each country, and test skiers to please a majority and prove them efficient in the ski-ing peculiar to that country and not necessarily prove them as all-round skiers.

The S.C.G.B. tests are sensibly tests in alpine downhill running. One shortcoming in them as such to me seems to be that they have no theoretical side, nothing demanding a realization of avalanche dangers or a study of snow-craft.

But tests are worth all you put into them, all the lessons in ski-technique you may take to qualify. Ski-ing, if you want to stay at the stage of boisterous childhood, can be giggling and rolling about in the snow and staying in

the valleys. You could do as much in your own back-yard. But if you want to tour, if you want to exercise your competitive spirit, you've got to take learning intelligently and seriously. But this is obvious.

We were discussing ski-clubs. After the S.C.G.B. come several distinguished subsidiary and affiliated ski-clubs. Some of them are old and honourable, select and sometimes expensive. They can be taken too seriously. There are others organized along more or less commercial lines to serve various types of skiers. Their existence is explained by the craving of human beings to remain with their own kind and class, even in a foreign country, and by the fact that there is considerable legitimate profit for the organizers in transportation and hotel accommodation, commission on equipment, and so forth. For those booking with them as members there seems to be a good service in return.

Such clubs will usually arrange for their members to go to any centre they choose. Other clubs are essentially local and relate to one resort only. When you arrive in a centre you will find many of these.

There is usually a cosmopolitan club organized by the *Kurverein* or municipal winter sports bureau; the local Swiss ski-school may be under its auspices, and it arranges regular tours and tests. If you shun "foreign" contacts, avoid them. If you like variety in people and want to join guided parties without paying too much for a guide, they are worth investigating. Naturally they vary in efficiency with their organizers.

Then big hotels or groups of hotels have ski-clubs for their guests, and some of these manage to assume naïve kudos. But again, where someone is paid to look after you, where a sports director and guides are at your service, you are likely to get good service; and that is important.

When you are at the mercy of a voluntary organizer, when you may feel under an obligation and think an official is bestowing a favour, it is against ease and efficiency. But the so-called voluntary official is by no means always unpaid. He is often, if not usually, getting his winter

holiday in a good hotel for nothing, in return for assisting in ski-club routine; and he or she must accept their responsibility with the best grace possible. On the other hand you can't consider them as gigolos, as guides or as professional instructors. It's all a bit brittle.

V

But much though I respected Andermatt's gay White Hares, I had to be off, and with the first break in the weather I followed a party from Natschen along the Oberalp Pass eastwards toward the Calmot, a small mountain commanding the Pass, and after climbing it I bade farewell to my friends and joined another party descending the far side of the Pass towards Sedrun.

In the past few days I had met many new hospitable personalities, and again I found the breaking of those casualties a depressing business. There were the people with whom I had made a tour one snowy day to near the summit of the Winterhorn above Hospenthal: the handsome guide Miggi, patient and considerate; the nice girl who got so depressed and embarrassed because she couldn't keep up with the party on the descent; the man with one eye who must have found the flat light and obscurity hopelessly deceiving. Later there was an older guide, a silent man with a walrus moustache who had once carried a woman on his back down a couple of thousand feet after she had broken her leg. He cut two large holes in his rucksack, seated her in it, and brought her down on skis without a jar or a fall; a feat of great strength and skill.

Always, of course, there had been Charlie, the conductor of the little steam train from the village to Natschen. Charlie was definitely a character, and knew it. He teased people in three and four languages. He kept his train parked so it would serve as a wind-break to his friends at the top as they were adjusting their skis. He climbed calmly through barricades of ski-sticks and legs and collected his fares and punched *abonnements*. He, undoubtedly, was Andermatt.

There were moments there when I began to resent my

fellow-men, to feel there were too many of them. One was when I first found myself caught up in the rhythm of a party climbing on skis, found my legs and my arms moving in time, caught up in the mechanical gait of ascent, and began to feel myself merely a pair of legs in a mechanical centipede. In the procession from Natschen along the Oberalp a woman began to walk doggedly over the heels of my skis, and my resentment became tinged with hysteria. But it was schooling for what lay ahead.

From the Oberalp I followed a guide with a small party down towards Sedrun, the first part being down a valley whose sides had avalanched plentifully, and where I saw how wise had been the counsels of my Andermatt friends against running it by myself in bad weather. I skied down the road to Disentis, dined in a little pub with a stone-flagged floor where there were framed memorials to inhabitants who had died in 'flu epidemics, and caught a train for Coire that night. Davos was my destination.

Chapter Eighteen

DAVOS HAUTE MONDE

I

DAVOS is one of the most beautifully situated, most popular and best-equipped resorts in Switzerland. Whatever the guide-books say about it is true. The February morning I arrived the sun was shining warmly and fulsomely. I should have been properly appreciative, but I wasn't.

The long main street was what might be described in a magazine article as being "gay and animated." One is likely to picture a musical comedy setting to that phrase, with people gesturing grandly and over-acting as they talk, policemen breaking into diverting little tap-dances, and the stage as busy as a three-ringed circus. Actually it was picturesque in a genteel way. Sleighs jangled up and down the one long street. Big red buses passed occasionally, bristling behind with skis thrust in the ski-racks at the back. People lounged in deck-chairs in the sunshine, or had coffee at little tables. They were anonymous and a little inscrutable behind sun-glasses, and most of them had a deep bathing-beauty tan acquired with a minimum of exercise. All this I should have found diverting, but I didn't.

For some reason, physiological as much as psychological, probably the effect of travel on my liver, I chose to be a misanthrope. I could only be aware of loud-speakers that blared forth at every square along the route; and I took grim satisfaction in being told that there used to be a town band that played at noon, but that they installed the loud-speakers figuring that they would be better and cheaper. I could only dwell gloomily upon the decadence

of people who sat in the sun and who didn't ski; and on the swaggering forwardness of those who did ski and who crowded in ahead of me at the Parsenn railway station. I suffered from claustrophobia, megalomania, and spots-before-the-eyes that day. In short, I was very disagreeable.

Davos and the Parsenn were indeed a radical change after little Andermatt, the Oberalp, and the small resorts at Sedrun and Disentis I had passed. I was plumped into what appeared to be a resort city. It was busy, pre-occupied and impersonal. There were long queues of people waiting for places in the cable-cars hauled every twelve minutes up close to four thousand feet. They were fashionable, well dressed; and there were slick young men about, just too devastatingly smart, who, to my chagrin, could ski like nobody's business. The atmosphere was no longer English, it was cosmopolitan. This was one of the largest and smartest winter sports resorts in the world; and adjustment came with difficulty.

I was facing ski-ing that is famous the world over, and as I was dragged higher and higher in the cable-car, and then changed somewhere in the upper regions to another that slipped relentlessly up more thousands of feet, my stomach curled itself smaller and smaller and my spirits sank lower and lower.

I have never been able to go up one of those wretched funiculars or cable railways for the first time without being in a blue funk. Once their deviltry is known, they are not bad, and you rush back time and again, mesmerized almost; but when you are alone, and the run down from the top is reputed to be about the steepest and fastest and most formidable in the country, you can reasonably be alarmed.

Like many things in life, your ability to ski is determined largely by your mental attitude. You drive a car with confidence and you drive well; or you're nervous and you drive badly. You are hesitant over your tennis, and you get nowhere; or you are tense and you fail; then you relax and all goes well, you start to lean into your strokes, and the ball travels like a bullet.

I was not in the right attitude to approach the Parsenn. You must be technically good and then ski as if you didn't care a damn; or you must be precise and careful and keep under strict control. I had come with the mentality of a bear and the heart of a rabbit. Only defeat could await me.

With an unhappy faculty for choosing the most difficult route first, I headed down the Standard Run. It followed the upper section of the railway down easy slopes of unbroken white. The sun had retired behind a mist, and contours were invisible. I gingerly descended in a series of cautious swings, taking slopes of unknown gradient obliquely, and wishing, as I looked back at my tracks, that I had had the nerve and the knowledge of the terrain to take them straight.

Then the route ducked under the railway, and the landscape, from being lofty and remote with little sense of scale, dropped suddenly away, and the smallness of the buildings below in Davos was revealed.

The quality of the snow changed. The fresh snow developed a breakable crust, making turning difficult, and as I descended the fresh snow seemed to have been scanty, and to have been blown across glare, hard-beaten shoulders of ice to lodge in now-crustured patches.

The slope saved itself, to my now bewildered and bruised spirit, from being sheer only by a series of bumps and terraces; and I became so exasperated with clattering, slithering and falling over ice on which my steel edges seemed to make no impression, or from getting tripped and thrown by the crust breaking and catching an edge where I had hoped to slide, that I ceased to worry about height. Human figures far below were ant-like, but I could only attend to the next ten yards and frantically wonder how I was going to negotiate them.

It was terrain that with good snow would have been an exciting adventure. With bad snow and my frame of mind it was a catastrophe. I heard a "veteran Silver K" skier say he had come down that portion of the run half an hour later and had thought of giving up ski-ing. We shared the mood that causes golfers occasionally to break

their clubs and fling them into a water-hazard. Luckily it never lasts for long. You are merely sadder, wiser and chastened.

I was, at any rate.

II

Davos was queer. It had easy access to some of the best ski-running country in the Alps. It was patronized by the most intense of alpine downhill racers. And yet it had the atmosphere of the Riviera: it was definitely "Grand Hotel."

The Grand Hotel formula of story-telling would reveal about Davos a curious juxtaposition of plot and unrelated counter-plot.

Some stories would hark back to the sad days of the sanatoria, to the backgrounds of the *Magic Mountain*, *Ships that Pass in the Night*, and the *Man without a Temperament*. The setting is macabre to anyone who has had any contact with tuberculosis. The wasting away, the look of health, the undying hope, and then, in a minute the end.

Yes, people get well, but the people you love are not always among them.

One story would tell of a young German who came there during the War, too weak and tubercular to serve his country, and how the climate built him up into a young giant. Like most ex-patriots his love of his native land grew as he longed for it, and he began to serve it under the new regime as unofficial organizer of its political activities in Switzerland. He became a Goliath, perhaps a dangerous Goliath, and from the persecuted there came a David to slay him. It was purely political, the two men did not know each other; but the boy David used an automatic instead of a sling-shot, and the giant was apparently unarmed.

"I do not understand," said the man's wife when confronted with the murderer, "you have such kind eyes."

To which the David is said to have replied bitterly: "I am a Jew. That should explain everything."





This was the 1936 Murder in Davos. Verdict: Eighteen Years' Penal Servitude.

Another story impinging on this is less sinister. I met there a young German, dined with him frequently, learned a lot about his country, his hopes and his fears for it. As it is unwise to draw conclusions about other people's politics, I withhold opinion; but I was intensely curious. He told an English acquaintance and me shyly once that he had spent the afternoon reading literature that would have got him into serious trouble in his native land, and that he had eaten up several English papers we had given him. He told how he listened on the radio at home to Russian propaganda, which struck him as being as absurd as his own, and how there were various things they could and could not do.

"Wasn't it interesting," I said to my English acquaintance. "Wasn't it sad," he said simply.

Near the table shared by the German and myself sat a portly Swiss. He radiated grave goodwill.

To our surprise he asked us both to dine one evening. A special little supper he explained it would be, an essentially Swiss supper. He was German-Swiss, and his French was good, but to my unpractised ear difficult, and he took trouble to explain things with agonizing clearness. I was a bit anxious over the prospect; but it might be gay and interesting, and my German friend would be there to support me.

He was, but he was the only other person there. We arrived to find our host ran a florist's shop. The place was dark and cold, but a light was burning over a partition in the back, and three places were set about a tiny table.

This was going to be nerve-wracking. The air was chill to keep the flowers content, their scent was heavy, and if there is anything I detest more than the scent of many flowers I cannot recall it. The prejudice comes, perhaps, from covering too many funerals and writing too many obituaries beside coffins in cub-reporter days. Anyway, there it is.

It was nerve-wracking. Conversation laboured. The

German and I pulled what wise-cracks we could in French, but they evoked only a tolerant smile.

I enthused over Switzerland. Still little response, I chattered about my country. He listened patiently.

Our host was undoubtedly a good and kind man. He had himself marvellously in hand, and at times the grandeur of his patient reserve was frightening. He possessed the physique, he seemed to be the type, that should have been merrier, more excitable, more frivolous. There was something temperamentally deflated about him. I couldn't quite figure him out. Why had he selected us to be honoured at his board?

The meal was simple. It was *frommage fondu*, a large communal bowl of liquid cheese brewed slowly and with much ceremony; and into it each person dipped a lump of bread, stirred it about, bit off the "dunked" portion and stirred again. I squelched any scruples about sharing microbes, and wondered how my stomach would manage so much cheese.

Then our host ventured the first lead of the evening. He said something about how much happier his life had become. A germ of suspicion entered my mind.

I hurriedly said that yes, Switzerland was a land to make anyone happy. I stalled for a good five minutes.

He resolutely went back to remarking how his life had been changed. I tried again, but my resistance was shorter lived.

Next came the French equivalent to a "quiet time" and I knew definitely what I was in for.

I had seen the phenomena of the Oxford Group in Canada. To hear the formula in another language was disconcerting. To have to cope with the mentality in a foreigner was baffling. I drew all the herrings across his evangelical trail I could find, but they were of no avail. Now he concentrated on the German.

Here was something my friend had never heard of. His ears were flapping. Nazism had shielded him hitherto.

The florist told us a little about his life. He had been impatient, cross with his employees. Now he was other-

wise, overwhelmingly otherwise. He had even been a bit hard in his business. At least he said that now he was thoroughly scrupulous, so the inference was that he'd pulled some fast stuff in his time.

He cited a few things indicating the depths to which he had sunk. Violets had been sold as fresh, when really they weren't quite fresh.

Once there had been a large order of roses. He had charged two hundred francs and there were supposed to be two hundred roses. There hadn't been, and his delivery lacked a dozen or more. His client had been over-charged.

The crime didn't prey on his mind until the Group with its Quiet Times worked its way into the alpine valleys; and then he couldn't sleep for the memory. There was only one way out. He had to confess and make reparation.

As if the hand of God had ordained it he found the client he had wronged many years before was staying in town at that very time. He went to her and Told All.

She was much surprised and became a very good customer. In fact the whole practice was good for business. When violets were not quite fresh now, he said so, and he found people bought them anyway. It was wonderful how frankness gingered things up.

My German friend's eyes goggled. After a time they became glazed a little. Then he blinked and begged to be excused.

He shook his head when we left. "Le pauvre . . . et ses pauvres violets . . ." he murmured. Then: "The Gruppe is forbidden in Germany. . . . Maybe my Government is not so bad after all. . . ."

III

I picked up several curious souvenirs of my homeland in Davos. One was a large collection of mail that I dumped into an empty rucksack and read in the Parsenn railway and thereby rendered myself immune to the heights. Each letter was an impact on the system of some sort.

There were several returned manuscripts that had inconsiderately sought me out, a small cheque for one that had been accepted, a letter from a girl saying to go and throw myself over the highest precipice I could find and that she was off to dine with a man I detested, and a circular from a broker.

Nostalgia was heightened when I found a Swiss friend in the train had once lived in Montreal. He began a recital of streets and places he had known ten years before. "St. Catherine's Street? It was still there? And the Laurentians, St. Saveur in the Laurentians? Were they still the same?" He wasn't particularly interested to know: the mere mention of the names seemed to bring back old memories and to give him some sort of comfort. Thereafter we had half a dozen place-names in common, and it put us on an equal footing, like members in a secret society.

As a counter-irritant another young Swiss, an engineer, had once lived in Drummondville, in the province of Quebec. He showed no enthusiasm when I boasted of knowing Drummondville myself. He suggested that he knew Drummondville better than I did: he had wintered there. "French-Canadian cooking is terrible," was all he said. "Roast pork—ugh!" He dismissed the episode as quickly as was decent.

With him and several other Swiss I ran down from the top of the Parsenn to Kublis, a drop of about six thousand feet in eleven miles—or is it eleven kilometres? It is one of the classic ski-runs of the world.

From the high points reached from the top of the funicular above Davos a dozen such runs sprawl in every direction, ending conveniently on railroads so you can be brought effortlessly home again. There is anywhere from three thousand vertical feet of downhill running above the tree-line, and another two or three thousand below it. It is Paradise, glittering Elysian Snowfields commanding views of the alpine upper world extending tumultuously as far as the eye could see like a limitless field of icebergs. I tried most of the runs when I was there, but I liked that to Kublis the best; it combined the variety of a tour with

the speed of a run. The average skier's time was two hours; the record, sixteen minutes by Otto Furrer.

I ran it several times, but never did I enjoy it as much as I did with my Swiss friends, in a snowstorm. As they worked in offices in Zurich and were out on holiday to get all they could, they didn't let weather interfere with their plans, for they belonged to the breed that liked to ski, come what may.

The wind was sweeping clouds of snow past the tiny station and restaurant at the head of the railway. The scenery was blocked out completely. Visibility was restricted to a few yards. I tied my parka hood tight over the top of my head, adjusted a pair of dark glasses in the hope of shielding my eyes and of seeing a little of the changes of contour, and clamped my skis reluctantly in place.

"Toute pour le sport," I mumbled gloomily, and my Swiss friends grinned and led off. Then began a strange experience in follow-the-leader. My comrades lost all sense of individuality and personality, but were only dim outlines in an icy blizzard; sometimes gesturing, sometimes ahead, sometimes behind. The adventure was nightmarish, so unreal did it seem; and I was sorry when we dropped below the storm near timber-line and the scene changed completely. I barnacled on the heels of the leader following his every manoeuvre. Stemming, turning, running straight, watching his knees for warning as to bumps or drops in the slope. Anything he did I had to do a split second afterwards. I had to keep three yards behind in order not to lose him to sight, and so as not to have to do my own guessing as to what lay ahead.

The snow was light and soft, our skis were running effortlessly, and with no shadows, no trees, no landmarks other than occasional poles upright in the snow to show the route, it was difficult to tell whether we were moving. It was like floating in a grey void, suspended in a nothingness that might come up suddenly and biff one in the face. It would have been as easy in complete darkness.

To show that our adventure was anything but adventurous, a lad caught up to us ski-ing between the shafts of

a sled on which he was taking supplies from the head of the railway down to one of the intermediate huts. I had never seen anyone ski under such good control in front of so much weight before.

Then one of the Parsenn patrols passed, toiling slowly up-grade to watch for anyone lost or hurt. And shortly we rounded the corner where there was an S O S telephone and an ambulance sled stacked upright by a direction-post. If anyone had got injured they would have been run down by sled to Klosters or Kublis in short order. I remember meeting a Frenchman on the train who had broken a leg on the run the year before, and who remembered the speed with which he was attended to more than the pain of the accident.

With clear light at the tree-line, ski-ing was infinitely better, though perhaps less interesting. I merely had to nod my head in the direction I wanted to go, and my skis veered about. It was like riding a bicycle without handlebars.

We dashed through two small settlements, dropped into Kublis, had a glass of warm *gluhwein* in the restaurant by the station, and caught the train up to Davos.

One little picture of ski-ing in a blizzard was finished, another took its place.

My Swiss friends began to sing. The youngest, homeliest and merriest seemed to have an inexhaustible repertoire—in four languages. They sang, all of them, in German, French, Italian and English; and when I tried some French-Canadian airs on a small mouth-organ, they produced others on a larger mouth-organ. It was a small close compartment, packed with my friends and dozens of others; two old gentlemen in a corner were slightly lit and sang a little off key; and in the seat beside me was a handsome square-jawed Swissess with dancing eyes and a voice that trilled rapturously over the ripest ditties. I didn't understand what was sung, but only the spirit of it; and because it all happened in four languages, I found it four times as much fun as it would have been otherwise.

I tried to help my Swissess neighbour off the train, but

she would have none of it. "Un ami" would be there to meet her: she was booked.

I like to think those few incoherent moments will go on living. Life is made of many such inconsequential oddities, and when several people between them bring a few moments of happiness into being, I think of it as something human, something with a composite personality, something that can never be again and yet that can never perish utterly.

When my Swiss friends had to leave for their work in Zurich, more ties were broken, and again I wondered what humanly would turn up.

Chapter Nineteen

SNOW OVER AROSA

I

UPROOTING myself from my little hotel in Davos-Platz was complicated. I miscalculated time, struggled with luggage, and finally had to hitch a typewriter and a dispatch case to the outside of my rucksack and carry them dangling to the station.

There I met Albert Tall, a Swiss acquaintance from London with whom I had arranged to make the next stage of my journey. He looked at my load appalled.

"Good God," he asked piously, "you don't take your writing as seriously as all that? You don't propose to *ski* with a typewriter?"

He was shaken. He realized I was queer, but time alone could prove how queer. The typewriter looked unpromising.

But we got things sorted out, my luggage, with typewriter, sent by train to St. Moritz, and began to make plans. It should have been obvious they would not work out. The weather had been unsettled, there had been heavy snow-falls, the sky was overcast and it was snowing a little even then. We intended to ski from Davos to Arosa, Lenzerheide, and, via the Kesch Hut, to St. Moritz, all of which means that we had to cross several high passes and make a three- or four-day journey southward. Like my intended trek from Jungfrauoch, it all depended on good weather and snow conditions. There could be no taking chances with avalanches.

Obviously it was impossible to start that afternoon, and Tall sensibly attacked first the problem of luncheon and of

getting ourselves accommodated in Davos Dorf. I realized then he was a man of resource, and of many friends.

In fact I have never met a man with so many. "Tall?" said an English skier I had met earlier, "he skies like a demon. You'll get lots of excitement."

"Monsieur Tall?" said a little miss in pigtails behind the hotel counter. "Oh, he is very nice."

And a Swiss guide: "Albert? Oh, he's Romansh. He's crazy, but he's a good friend of mine."

The fact that he was Romansh, could speak all the languages any normal Swiss could speak and another, almost unknown language, into the bargain, set him apart; and I began to learn a little about the Romansh Swiss.

They, you know, are not Italian-Swiss, but are a little group that have retained a Roman culture and a form of old Roman language and their tongue, Ladin or Romansh, is their proudest possession.

They are good Swiss, are the Romansh men of the Engadine, but they stick to their own culture and their own private tongue with all the tenacity and fanaticism of the Welsh or the Celts, and they are looked on as being something odd and incalculable by other Swiss. Their compatriots cherish the suspicion that they have a vein of secretiveness that enjoys having a language that no one else in the world can speak; and I think there is something in it.

However, they are an alert, intelligent lot; they have heroic history behind them as a people; and they could not have been better or more pleasantly represented than by my friend Tall.

Tall knew everyone, and everyone knew Tall. Wherever we went doors flew open, and drinks were on the house. The manager of one of the crack hotels of Davos was a friend of his, the family devoted themselves to feeding me. At Arosa two managers divided him bodily between them; and half the guides in St. Moritz seemed to know him intimately. When we stopped at a small hut miles from anywhere above the tree-line, a man came to the door who had been to school with him. Our tour was one reunion after another.

He was a swarthy, dark-eyed man, medium in height, thin, and when he moved, he moved fast. There would be people sitting nearby and he would listen, no matter what the language. "Shall we talk to them?" he'd say, and because he enjoyed dealing with human beings more than anything else in the world, in three minutes he'd make contact.

Once I remember he listened carefully. "I think those people are French-Canadians," he said. "Shall we talk to them?" When we did, they proved to be Alsacians. Life with him was never dull.

After a day in Davos waiting for the weather to clear, we took off from the Weissfluhjoch at the top of the Parsenn railway and began our trek towards Arosa. We chose to take the route to Langwies, giving more downhill running, and to take a train from there up to Arosa.

The snow conditions were good, but the light was difficult. It was clear, but there were no shadows, and once Tall skied straight over a small cliff. It was luckily only eight feet high or so; but from above it was invisible.

Our route left the main trail towards Kublis and branched over the back of the ridge and down a valley where the half-buried shapes of cow chalets began to appear. From one below us there came a hail.

"Ski, Heil!" called a voice from a quarter of a mile away; and investigation proved it to be another friend.

We paused there for a while, were given a thimble-full of Kirsh, which was quite enough, and continued very reluctantly. The chalet was a peasant's hut, with a huge stone stove in the corner, taking up about a sixth of the floor-space and serving to keep the whole of the house warm, and it had been rented by a group of young people from Zurich. There was a notice on the door where the House Regulations were enumerated. On no account, it ran, was anything to be washed up or tidied up; everything, in fact, was to be thrown on the floor; no one was to trouble to get fuel, just use the furniture; and naturally when anyone went off on a hike they were never to leave

word as to where they were going or when they expected to return. It was all pleasantly idiotic.

The setting of the peasant's hut, well built and panelled, and in the style peculiar to the district, reminded me of Ste. Adele in the Laurentians, and of *habitant* farms I had seen used by skiers under similar circumstances. The language about me was the Swiss-German of Zurich, but the spirit was the same, and I was a little homesick.

We dropped down to Langwies, caught the train to Arosa, spent a comfortable night there, and left the next afternoon by ski for the Hornlihutte. I liked Arosa, which was scattered attractively along the mountain-side close to the tree line, but I was anxious to continue, even in the face of unfavourable conditions.

We took a bus, a Swiss-made bus with the driver on the right-hand side for better control on mountain roads, and climbed through to the upper outskirts of the town. Gingerly we worked our rucksacks, our ski-sticks and ourselves from the confines of the machine, retrieved our skis from the rack at the rear, and looked about us.

The sun was shining brightly over lush billows of snow-field that rose, unbroken by trees, to a pass far ahead. Behind was Arosa, with a background of forest and rugged mountains that set it off in the approved picture post card style. We were surrounded by skiers, most of whom were beginning the ascent of the slopes before us at that hour, and, stripping off extra sweaters, we joined the procession.

In a minute I stopped. The sun was shining all right, but there was a faint mist in the sky that cut the warmth from its rays, and the breeze when it came was surprisingly chill. I replaced my balloon silk wind-breaker over my shirt and plugged ahead once more, hoping not to get overheated.

I had strapped on my plush climbing skins, and there was nothing to do but watch my ski-points mechanically move forward, and to attempt to regulate my breathing. Left ski, right ski; a breath for every four paces, at first—then for every two . . . in with the right ski, out with

the left . . . when the slope was steeper, the air thinner, and my load heavier.

It was hot enough to make me regret my light wind-breaker, but as we tramped over the hard beaten track, the wind would suddenly blast down the slope, and I was glad enough of it. Once it blew off my dark glasses in its rude interruptions of the valley's sunny tranquillity and gave me a foretaste of what was to come.

Across the white space of the valley the opposite slopes were streaked with avalanches—"Lousy with 'em," I wrote to a friend—but on our side the snow held secure. At an easy pace we passed the Carmenna hut, where most of the Arosites were left behind, and headed into a stiff slope of patchy, wind-blown snow. A few skiers were coming down and having difficulty. It is tricky stuff to handle, you know. When you go to turn sometimes the edge of your controlling ski catches, and sometimes it skids; sometimes the surface bears you and sometimes it doesn't. It makes ski-ing more interesting than amusing.

Beyond the crest the grade was easier and the tracks narrower. A single party was ahead now, bound like ourselves for the Hornlihutte. Occasionally it showed against a high horizon loud with tempest. We seemed to be climbing from peace into a variety of alpine purgatory.

The sun was now a blob in the sky, sometimes bright enough to daze the eyes, sometimes a dull patch like the moon. Clouds streamed over the pass ahead, and winds rose to meet them. We were buffeted about continually now, and often had to stop to stand firm against the wind and to get our breath. Dervish whirlpools of snow swept the rounded slopes in the shallow valley on our left. They were born upon the steep flanks of the valley on our right, forming like icy wraiths upon some overhanging cornice, and twirling furiously across our path.

The trail we followed was almost obliterated with wind-blown snow. If Tall got more than a few yards ahead of me, his tracks were erased. It was not really cold enough to add sweaters, but I stopped and pulled the string of my parka hood tight over the top of my head and under my chin.

The figures of the party ahead were silhouetted against the ridge leading from the pass to the hut. They were crouched low and seemed barely to be moving. They were half an hour in advance and yet were not far distant.

I broke trail for a time and gained the narrow saddle from where the route turned and mounted over glazed and wind-baked snow to the hut. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile away now, but it took an eternity to get there.

From beyond the pass, where a deeper gulf yawned and there were snow-fields embraced by a high amphitheatre of mountain-slopes, the wind was blowing like a hurricane. We had to ascend in the teeth of it, our flank exposed as we worked up the narrow ridge over which it streamed and blustered with terrific force. It would have been helpful to know that it blew at sixty miles an hour, or eighty; but there was no way of knowing, and as we crouched low against it I was able to imagine myself as really frightfully intrepid.

Tall told me later of two things to guard against. One was letting my skis come clear of the snow, in which case they would have been whipped about by the wind like matchsticks and twisted my ankle. And the other was leaning into the wind. When its force suddenly dropped one was likely to dive gracefully over the precipice. It was better to crouch low and mutter fiercely.

The climbing skin on Tall's left ski chose this juncture to become loosened, and he did all the muttering that was necessary for the two of us. He huddled in the lee of a razor-back of snow to fix it, and the wind obligingly changed direction, and he was helpless until it lulled.

As we neared the cabin, my anxiety was divided between Tall, who was cursing over his sealskin twenty yards behind, and myself. I felt I might take wings any moment and be wafted into eternity. The gulf on the right was deepening, and rock flakes from the cliff were being scattered across the snow that rang like concrete beneath my skis. On the left the ridge appeared to have climbed above a white waste of unfathomable depth.

The hut was now only a few yards distant, and I could

see the word "Abort" clearly blazoned on an out-house perched on the edge of the cliff. A face watched us from a small window in the hut, ducking out of sight when the wind changed direction.

There was a final brave battle against the elements along the path past the *abort* to the hut, and then there was warmth, rest and hot frankfurters.

II

The Hornlihutte, on the first of two passes between Arosa and Lenzerheide, was my first alpine hut, and I was to have ample time to examine the one room where we ate, slept and killed time from Saturday afternoon until Monday morning.

There were permanent benches with sloping backs around the three walls, which were pine panelled, and long tables and stools of pine occupying the floor. The ceiling was low to conserve the heat from the tile stove, so low that my head brushed the beams, and the windows were small and double framed. The whole setting was clean and simple, in far better taste I thought than most of the Swiss hotels.

How difficult it is to make people see how sound and good are the things their ancestors have been using and refining for centuries, how irritating that when they wish to become pretentious their judgment runs to rococo and all their instincts towards harmony and simplicity are lost.

I am all for modern architecture, functionalism, and so forth, but I am coming now to dread the loss of international individuality that will result. The best dwelling for most countries is the house that has been built of the local materials for the local conditions. They are an integral part of the landscape. They are truly functional. False prophets of modern architecture would supplant them with synthetic structures, things that are ugly because they are short-lived and cheap and at present in as bad taste as anything that accursed the nineteenth century. It is undoubtedly archaic and uneconomic to build thatched

cottages, but it is stupid to destroy them after lives of hundreds of years for jerry-building that will last ten.

I had time to editorialize on almost any subject, for we remained in that one small room from Saturday afternoon until Monday morning. The wind continued to blow and the snow to snow. The people who had preceded us to the hut returned that afternoon to Arosa, and thereafter there was nothing to do but to read the big hut register.

One entry should have been a lesson to us. A year before at the same date a party had arrived and recorded that there were five feet of new snow, thick clouds, and that they were completely snowed in. Bread had to be rationed. The third day there was an entry stating there was no improvement, day and night it was snowing . . . "the thermometer, barometer and our spirits are low." On the fifth there was still a blizzard, on the sixth a glimpse of blue sky, and on the eighth they escaped their prison. All this within sight of Arosa, which could be reached in five minutes' fast downhill running, if snow conditions were good.

Our delay was not because the weather prevented our returning to Arosa, that side of the pass being relatively safe. The route ahead was the difficulty. It traversed steep slopes, it was not as well marked; and to take chances would be foolish.

One anecdote had a particularly salutary effect.

The week before a party had visited the hut under the charge of a guide, had paused to take some soup, and had then continued in the direction we proposed to go. As was a habit, the hut-keeper's lad watched them depart and followed their route down the valley.

The guide was in the lead and headed cautiously across a bad slope, the others following single file. If conditions are obviously dangerous, skiers should be widely separated, and only one should move at a time across a suspected area. Evidently this was not suspected enough, for the three skiers in the rear started an avalanche between them.

There was a Swiss lawyer, his eighteen-year-old son, and

another man. The surface snow, wet and heavy, suddenly began to slide beneath their skis, and they were caught and pulled down. By a miracle the boy was thrown clear. One man was buried up to his knees and held fast. The third, the lawyer, disappeared.

The hut-keeper signalled to the guide, the lawyer's wife and another who had gone on, unaware of the accident, and then rallied his forces for a rescue. He secured rods for plumbing an avalanche, shovels, ropes, an emergency sled, and together with his wife, the lad who served as porter and two skiers who happened to be there, they skied down to the scene of the accident.

"Help! Help!" shouted the man who was buried up to his knees, but they paid no attention to him. The great thing was to find the man who was buried.

They started probing with the rods, and soon the young porter called that he felt something, but that it was hard, like a rock. The hut-keeper investigated with a professional touch and found it was a head, buried five feet below the surface.

"Help!" screamed the man whose feet were buried. He was clawing at the hard-packed snow with his fingers and making no impression. "Can't you see me?"

They dug down to the body of the buried man and found it twisted and huddled in the snow. It was packed so tight that the straps of his rucksack broke when they tried to pull him clear.

He was unconscious when he was found, fifteen minutes after he had been buried, and as they got him on to the emergency sled he began to babble deliriously. Apparently, apart from a lump on his head, he was unhurt physically, but he had become unbalanced.

Where was he? How had he come here? He had been dead for three years, he explained, and it had been very trying because he could see his family all the time, and he had a very pretty young wife, and he missed her very much.

It took some time for him to calm down. His wife was brought to him and he began to realize what had happened.

"Help!" came almost hysterical calls from across the snows. "Don't you want to save me . . . don't you think I'm worth saving? What the . . . What the . . ."

Then and only then did they go and release the man who was held helpless by his skis below the avalanche. He had been safe and out of the way, and there had been no need to attend to him until the missing man had been found.

He proved to be almost as unbalanced as his friend. He was fully persuaded they were going to leave him there to freeze to death.

This was an avalanche story with its funny side, but three people had narrowly escaped death; and others had risked further accident in going to rescue them.

III

And here I think something should be said about avalanches. In Canada we call them, in an undertone, snow-slides; but they threaten few skiers, and the only trouble they give us is to our railways. It is inevitable that they should, along with other acts of providence, but they have come to be one of the facts of Canadian life that we just don't officially acknowledge. For a long time to mention snow in relation to Canada was like inadvertently breathing a naughty word at a polite dinner-table; but now that winter sports are recognized as an asset, we are less hesitant.

The Swiss are thoroughly proud of their railways and their railwaymen, and there are many stories of how the latter have fought to prevent avalanche accidents, how they've died to save others, and how they philosophically work away at their lines, just so other people can have a good time.

Not long ago two men were working on the line when they heard one of the regular trains approaching. At the same instant they saw an avalanche start on a slope high above them. If it caught the train there might be a serious accident.

They ran, not to save themselves, but to warn the

train. They stopped it in time; and they were both killed beneath the snow.

To skiers in the Alps avalanches are something to guard against like the plague. Beginners are not likely to encounter them, but rather moderately competent skiers who venture unguided into the relatively unfamiliar high country for which they have longed.

With the thought that some readers may be interested I shall quote fragments on the subject from the Ski Club of Great Britain handbook. If they remember the gist of it, it may save their lives.

Beware of newly fallen snow at freezing point on slopes over 22 degrees for three days after a fall. During mild weather moderate slopes with a 15-degree gradient are liable to slide, and the afternoon is more dangerous than the morning. Lee slopes where snow has been piled by wind should be watched; and particularly slopes beaten slab-hard by wind, which give a deceptive impression of security. Traverses over dangerous slopes should be avoided, and if crossing is essential, it should be high up, with loosened bindings, or with skis removed. Chances of survival are better without skis attached, and a man on foot is less likely to start a slide than a man on skis. On suspected slopes an interval of a hundred or even three hundred yards should be kept between members of a party.

All this, and more, are merely common-sense precautions like not standing under a tree in a lightning storm, or not pointing a gun, or not picking up a wire that might be alive.

After you have seen the effects of an avalanche, have seen a friend barely escape with his life, and have watched them boom over cliffs and sprawl broadly down snow-slopes and out into valleys, you become very interested in such details and enjoy your ski-ing the more because you know you must keep your wits about you.

Chapter Twenty

ENDING IN THE ENGADINE

I

SO we didn't ski to St. Moritz: we took the train. It necessitated early rising in the Hörnlihutte, innumerable minor delays that narrowed our time interval, half an hour's ski-ing through heavy snow down to the village, and helter-skelter on skis through the streets to the railway station. It involved a detour back by way of Coire and Reichendau, and a long climb up an amazing railway that gyred through innumerable corkscrew tunnels until we emerged in the valley near St. Moritz.

That, geographically, ended my ski-tour. I settled down in St. Moritz and with Tall made the conventional runs down from Corviglia, above the town, made the Diavolezza loop, and skied to the saddle from Muottas Muraigl looking into the Bernina and across towards Morteratsch.

Also, with others, I skied to Fuorcla Surlej and ascended Piz Mortel, 11,000-foot twin to Corvatsch, and skied from Julier Pass to Fuorcla Grevaslavas, I also skied a little at Pontresina and Zuoz.

The preceding two paragraphs should be reeled off nonchalantly, with the right accent for all the names, to anyone who knows his St. Moritz, and his reaction will likely be: Dammit, that's more than I've managed to do in ten years in Switzerland. The truth is that I had a month to do it in, and a month to accomplish my peregrinations prior to St. Moritz; and the average English skier, to his infinite disgust, is seldom able to get much more than a couple of weeks in the Alps. So in my Swiss tour I was able to gobble through a whole lifetime of average ski-ing

and I should be, and am, properly appreciative of my good fortune.

But geographical mumbo-jumbo, which I only include for swank and to get the lucky-devil reaction from readers in the know, need not concern you.

St. Moritz, I discovered, though weather permitted me to do only a few of the many tours within reach, was a marvellous ski-ing centre, with roads or railways leading up several tributary valleys, with a funicular and ski-lift, and with much attractive atmosphere. It was not, to me, a high-pressure resort characterized by smart hotels, bars and noisy people. That is one aspect, and a very attractive one, judging from the way it is advertised. I settled down in St. Moritz and found it human and intimate. I lived simply and inexpensively, and I had a very good time.

A friend remarked that he would hate to live cheaply where others lived expensively; but I managed to do so without dismay. When the weather was bad, and in the evenings, my little typewriter kept me busy; and I never had enough time to ski as much or write as much as I wanted. That is, of course, a writer's selfish solution to the problem of life. He pretends to himself that what he thinks must be written and that what he writes may be interesting and profitable; even letters are an almost professional responsibility. It is a childish illusion and conceit, but, except when too many manuscripts come back together, it shields him from a lot of boredom. Naturally he knows himself for a fool at heart, knows that he can never make much money, never do as well as he should. The more he writes the more the shallow resources of his mind are apparent to him; and yet, it's fun, particularly combined with ski-ing.

The trouble was that most of the month's work I put in at St. Moritz got lost in the mails and there are almost identical twins to several of the preceding chapters floating about in the limbo of lost manuscripts—for which the reader can be duly thankful. Still, it gave me lots to do and think about, and I have several animated souvenirs of St. Moritz as a consequence.





Warmest and kindest of these is the memory of the welcome I got from several of my friend Tall's relations. They occupied a great house in the middle of the town that had been the headquarters of the family for a couple of centuries; and though at first I was given tea in the tiny *salon*, later, when I would call in the morning for my mail, I was allowed to have coffee and a second *petit déjeuner* in the kitchen. There the floor boards were worn smooth and round with scrubbing, beautifully carved old cupboards with rusty hardware stood in the corners, and every detail spoke of the Engadine. Whatever members of the family who were down would talk English or French to me and Romansh amongst themselves. There were children of different branches of the family in the house, some from the Dutch East Indies and some from England. The former could speak Dutch and Malay, but Romansh was the one language they had in common with their small cousins.

The grandmother would often give me my letters, and she would say that I must have a *bonne maman* to write me so often, and that she hoped I wrote as much in reply. One of her daughters was forever plying me with *café au lait* and rushing dynamically about helping to run the household and attend to her own job as tutor to visiting children. She had a vital streak of mischief to her because she turned out the St. Moritz police force, which lived next door and were otherwise friends of the family (though relations were strained for a while after), when, after a party to tide over a family crisis of some sort, she discovered her dapper *beau-frère* tiptoeing out of the kitchen with a loaf of bread under his arm. The gendarmes couldn't see the joke because it dragged them out of bed at two in the morning.

I lived for some weeks in a bright room across the street overlooking one of the village squares and the local school. It was the *salon* of the flat, I shared it with a stuffed owl and a clock that stood resolutely at 6.45; and I was told by my landlady to be careful not to put my wet ski boots on her nicely waxed floors. All of

which, for no visible reason, made me feel human and at home.

The little boys and the little girls in the school opposite screamed in the way children scream the world over, though it was all done in Romansh; but it was far enough away and sufficiently confused to be pleasant. When I watched them at recess I saw they were playing the same incredibly serious complicated and curious games that children love. The youngsters would stand solemnly in circles or would play a sort of court-tag, or they would wind in and out in processions of follow-the-leader. The older children gossiped in small groups.

But the ebb and flow of life at the school had little oddities that distinguished it from all other schools I had known. The little boys gravely shook hands with their teachers when they met them on the school grounds in the morning. And one and all, from the tiniest to the biggest, wore ski boots.

One day seemed to be specially set aside for their benefit. Chalanda Marz, it was called, the festival of spring anticipating the driving of the cattle to the hills. The larger boys were dressed in the blue smocks of shepherds, and the little boys had large cow-bells strapped round their tummies. An Engadine cow-bell is not a light handbell giving off a delicate tinkle. It is a monstrous, flattish, bud-shaped affair making a dull thump when the clapper strikes the side. Some are more monstrous than others, some are set upon highly decorated collars; and when hundreds of them are together in one small village square, and when they clank and clonk and rattle and thump as the urchins wearing them dash about in teams harnessed to sleds, the pandemonium is prodigious.

Sometimes sleighs would drive through the square with whole orchestras aboard playing jazz, whooping up the hectic air of welcome for visiting celebrities that the *Kurverein* felt would make them feel at home; sometimes there would be a dog fight; sometimes a horse would slip on the ice, fall down and refuse to budge, and there would be a great commotion.

Once a chimney-sweep passed by with his ladder, long wire brush coiled over his shoulder, sticks and rope, and like all good Swiss chimney-sweeps he was wearing his top hat. "C'est poetic, eh?" said my dynamic hostess across the way, and she told me that the men have a grand time at New Years when they're welcome at all the bars, when everyone stands them drinks, and all the girls want to kiss them. It's lucky to embrace a chimney-sweep at New Years—lucky for the chimney-sweep.

There was never any lack of variety in the life that passed beneath my window in St. Moritz.

The flat I shared was operated as a *pension*, and I would have meals in a small room where one must bow politely to everyone on leaving and entering. There was a shy little Hungarian there for a time and occasionally he would ask tentatively if I ever went to bars, and what I did in the evening, and as the days advanced he got pinker and pinker with the sun and his air of embarrassment heightened.

There were several Swiss on holiday from Zurich, and one of them cheered me hugely by cursing and shutting off the radio when a Canadian team was in process of trimming the Swiss at hockey—*eishockey*.

There were two of the landlady's children restricted to playing in the corridor immediately outside my door; but as their conversation was all in Swiss-German it was just a noise; and I could only be aware that they were pouring much unrequited love on a piccaninny doll; and I wondered what effect that might have on their predilections in after life.

I had a birthday when I was there and it was brightened by my landlady bringing me three carnations and setting them on the desk before my typewriter. Also when I woke that day, there came a telegram from my mother and father, and a letter from a blind friend of mine.

If, he wrote, I was going to tour the world and write about it aboard tramp steamers, I should avoid Norwegian boats; the grub was terrible. You should be careful of the company you choose, he added. Once he had shipped

with a Welsh captain who periodically got drunk and one evening appeared at the door of his cabin with a loaded automatic, explaining he was going to shoot the whole caboodle, so they could adjourn to Hell and play poker. He argued him out of it, but he didn't like the voyage. It was a letter of much affection and good cheer, and was about the nicest birthday present that I could have received.

I had no need on that or any other day to feel isolated and alone, for when I stayed in and worked on the dull days one man I knew would drop in and gossip photography or another would ask me out to tea. They both reminded me of my old tendencies to misjudge the English from the behaviour of a few, for I came to know them as two of the gentlest and most charming of men.

They were definitely good genii, and one of them had me to a gala dinner at the Kulm where I was privileged to throw cotton-wool pellets at the King of Egypt. He seemed a rather stolid young man, did King Farouk, and rather hedged about by his entourage of relatives and officials; but he improved as the evening progressed and showed great enthusiasm when he was able to pelt an old gentleman who was undoubtedly his Grand Vizier.

While in St. Moritz I took some trouble to investigate for a friend various schools to which he might send his son. One visit was well worth while. It was to Zuoz where there is a school, modelled after English public schools even to the extent of having model fives' courts and where the English master, a charming man, showed us about. He had to be on his toes, he said, for in teaching English the boys would want to discuss the spiritual qualities of Shelley and Goethe, and had anything but the mentality of the average English schoolboy.

I met one of the lads later on a train, and he turned out to be an American, speaking with a French accent. His father was in the diplomatic service, and he was worried that he wouldn't like his own country when he saw it for the first time. Another, a quick attractive lad, was dreading his return to his native land where

he would be cut off from his family and the world for some years in labour corps and military service. A boy who took us ski-ing to where downhill tests could be staged was a member of the Rothschild family. It was an oddly international college where the boys all spoke two if not three languages. But most wonderful to me was the ski-ing they had always at their doors.

Our host at Zuoz showed us several buildings in the village typical of the Engadine. Cow-barn, house and hayloft are united together under one roof. The cows are below and contribute to the heating, the living room, warmed further by a massive stone stove stoked from the outer corridor, is above; and the sleeping quarters on the floor above that. A small trap-door opens above the stove, and one may clamber up a tiny ladder on to the stove and from there to the bedroom above. The stove throws off a steady heat day and night, a fire is lit in it occasionally, and its heat is absorbed into the fabric and radiated to the house.

A beautifully carved doorway, with a small door for the use of the family, admits hay through the main corridor, but is only fully opened for the occasion. At the back are lofty openings closed by carved wooden grills behind which the hay is stored and allowed to dry. The walls are usually irregular and broken by slight changes of angle, as if the builders abhorred uniformity. The deep windows, set at random, in the walls, are often barred by Italianesque wrought iron grillwork. The house structure is wood, completely encased in stone and stucco, and under overhanging storeys are a series of characteristic arched brackets to support the fireproofing veneer. A special form of decorative mural is peculiar to the Engadine, *scrafiti* I think it is called, where the outer covering is scratched away to reveal another colour below. Rooms were panelled in larch, and the number of cupboards and cubbyholes in the walls and benches was infinite.

At Pontresina I was shown more such buildings, and a most ancient church whose tower I climbed. The

kurdirektor, who was my guide there was named Saratz a name said to have come from the Saracens who built the old watch-tower near the church; and when our tour was over he put on his skis and whisked down through the village to keep an appointment for tea.

II

But the foregoing is unfair. It gives no impression of St. Moritz, not the typical St. Moritz; nor does it relate to escaping on skis. I did plenty of that.

One trip with Tall to Muottas left me heady. The sun shone and it was warm. The junction of the Bernina with the broad trench drained by the Inn spread fifteen hundred feet below. There were Samaden and Celerina showing clearly against the white fields and slopes; and with a powerful telescope on the look-out at the head of the funicular, Tall could read the hour by the clock in St. Moritz four miles away. We surveyed a gigantic contour map that would look ridiculously unreal in an exhibition, with such peaks as Bernina, Palü, Julier and many others breaking the white horizon, and with a blue sky relieved by a few artificially fleecy clouds sweeping to the zenith.

The mere sight of it was intoxicating: "Wheeee," I squealed under my breath. Something *had* to be said. There was no sense of personal achievement to this view; we had come up by funicular; but heaven lay ahead.

On skins we climbed by a long traverse to the head of a valley whose mouth converged towards Bernina. We crossed to the opposite slope and ascended a glacier to a saddle looking across to the Palü country. A world of sun and snow and blue sky and mountain peaks swallowed us up, and any sign of man dropped away as we ascended. We lunched from paper bags beside a great boulder and met two English friends. Together we continued until we stood on a wind-blown col close to nine thousand feet in altitude, and wondered how we had been able to find an open route as we had done the previous day down the wrinkled face of the distant Morteratsch glacier.

"Wheeee," I felt it necessary to scream into the teeth of the wind. It was not a cold wind, the sun was still warm, and the world still seemed paradise.

Then there was the run down. A gorgeous sweep of glacier, a classic sweep, crevasses deep under snow, and only the changing quality of the surface to watch for. A little crusty in parts exposed to wind, and there jump turns were useful, but at either flank the snow was soft and turning easy.

"Wheeee," I shouted when my jumps came off, and even "Wheeee" when they didn't. Nothing short of a broken leg could have spoiled it.

The next stage was a long easy run down the valley and steeper pitches through the trees. "Wheeee" I had to keep saying like an engine intermittently letting off steam; and people practising on the lower slopes looked at me a little startled and suspicious. The Mad English no doubt.

No, not English, but quite, quite mad.

III

The Diavolezza Run, over the Morteratsch, again with Tall, had been great excitement. I had seen Piz Palü, and because I knew the movie—"The White Hell"—I was thrilled by its forbidding precipices, and bitterly disappointed when later a ski climb to its summit by the easier route from behind was thwarted—by weather as usual. It had been exciting to see the Hut, for I remembered the queer little tune that the water played falling from the icicle—but it had been still more exciting taking the run down.

Tall, as I have explained, moved fast when he moved; and as he proposed to enter a race over the Diavolezza course a week or so afterwards, I discovered he was turning our run into an all-out practice. He slipped down a trail bristling with rocks, he traversed at top speed a steep open slope, switched back as we approached more rocks, switched back again, and dropped into a gulley beside the glacier. There he had to stop to climb a little,

and I could regain my breath and look back at others gingerly coming down. It had been only a few seconds, apparently, seconds of dashing, bouncing, slithering, slewing; seconds of hope and fear and excitement.

"That," I panted, "was wonderful."

But Tall just grinned. "You ain't," he remarked with a conscious pride in his mastery of English slang, "you ain't seen nothing yet."

There was a half-mile or so across the glacier, gentle *lang-lauf*, and I was at ease. Then the trail dropped down again, easy and open, by one flank of the glacier.

"This," I said nonchalantly, catching up to Tall for a second, "*this* is wonderful."

His reply was the same: his smile enigmatical.

"You ain't," came the reiteration, "you ain't seen nothing yet."

But I was undaunted. I had hit my stride.

Then came *Isla Persa*.

The tracks dropped steeper and steeper. They disappeared over an edge of snow.

"You ain't . . ." shouted Tall, but I could hear no more because the slope had me in hand, and I was battling against gravity like Quixote against the windmills.

The slope didn't disappear; it just got worse. It funnelled down a narrow gorge, the steepest and longest I had seen, and I was glad to note that a Swiss customs' patrol was having difficulty, that others were kick-turning, and that, if I didn't stop and think how dizzy I was getting I could manage it passably myself. I fell once, of course, and the slope was such that I slid yards before I could check, but I discovered what all good skiers know, that steep slopes are easier to turn on than gentle ones, that very little effort will do it, and that all you need is determination.

So when I took all the punishment that was due me and scrambled undamaged out at the bottom I stopped awhile and looked up at others who followed and continued on my way with the cat-that's-eaten-the-canary look of achievement on my face.





Ski-ing was in fast company those days, and I had to speed, willy-nilly. One man had that forward-spirit to his ski-ing, that feet-together feeling. He took everything at top speed. "*Rucklage*" he would scream perversely at himself as a reminder that he should lean forward. "*Rucklage*."

Another friend was a little Swiss girl, with the quaintest and softest accent to her speech in English, who had passed through the course of instruction given by professional ski-teachers in Switzerland. She was the personification of a winged imp, and when she came to a slope that was smooth and steep and she set her skis straight down it, she'd break out yodelling with joy. Then I knew there was trouble ahead.

"Hold up you . . ." I'd curse aloud as I followed. Or again: "You louse you, you nervous timorous louse . . . hold up."

And often I would hold up, and I'd think at the end that I had passed during that *Schuss* down through the snow, somewhere very close to heaven on this earth.

And here, I think, is a good place to stop. During the year since I took my first run in the Rockies to the time when I took my last in Switzerland, much snow had fallen. Much had been hidden by it, much carried away for good in the spring. But many things that were conveniently hidden in the winter were revealed in the end as being permanent fixtures on the landscape and I had to become reconciled to them.

During that year I had found my mountains, literary or geographical, would not come to me, so I had to go to them. It was typical of my good genii that the two kinds should merge, and that they should give me such good ski-ing.

AUTHOR'S EPILOGUE

AS opposed to an Author's Foreword, which constitutes a sort of stumbling-block, I think something might be said for an Author's Lastword, an Afterthought, an Epilogue. In it he can predicate and dedicate, acknowledge, apologize and explain. Hence this further imposition on the reader.

The evasive quality that I pretend has motivated my ski-ing, my ski-ing to escape, perhaps characterizes also my writing. It temporizes, it passes the time. The sad part of a book of travel is that it really doesn't get anywhere, and at the end of this one I'm afraid it hasn't really progressed. It has taken the reader from the Rockies to the Alps, and the writer from a life of ease to a life of letters (which is the reverse); but that is not enough. To those sufficiently bemused to read it through it has perhaps a little of the autobiographical novel to it, with the truly honest intimacies left out. And naturally as such it can just be a beginning.

What I've wanted to do in the first part is to give a picture in the round of my own country, without letting too much of the prideful prejudice that I have for it creep in. In the second part my aim was, with an alpine background, to convey a little of the excitement, the ecstasy and the exercise that is ski-ing. The two mean a lot to me, the first deeply and everlastingly so.

For the pleasure of having lived many parts of this book, I have several people to thank; but the only return I can give them is to describe the things they and I love in common. I have had to do it in my own way, and because it is not always the conventional way I can only hope they are not disappointed. Appreciation that does not conform to established formula is often misunderstood;

and I have already the assurance of this in a quarter where I least expected it.

For the somewhat agonizing pleasure of having written this book ; for being indirectly forced, chivvied, encouraged, abused, shamed and aided into writing it I have several others to thank. Perhaps I should dedicate it to them, but as it may prove to be a very bad book, it might be no compliment. Besides the list would make queer company, and they might be at each other's throats. I'm sure my own dear mother and father, who would head the list, might be nonplussed, anyway.





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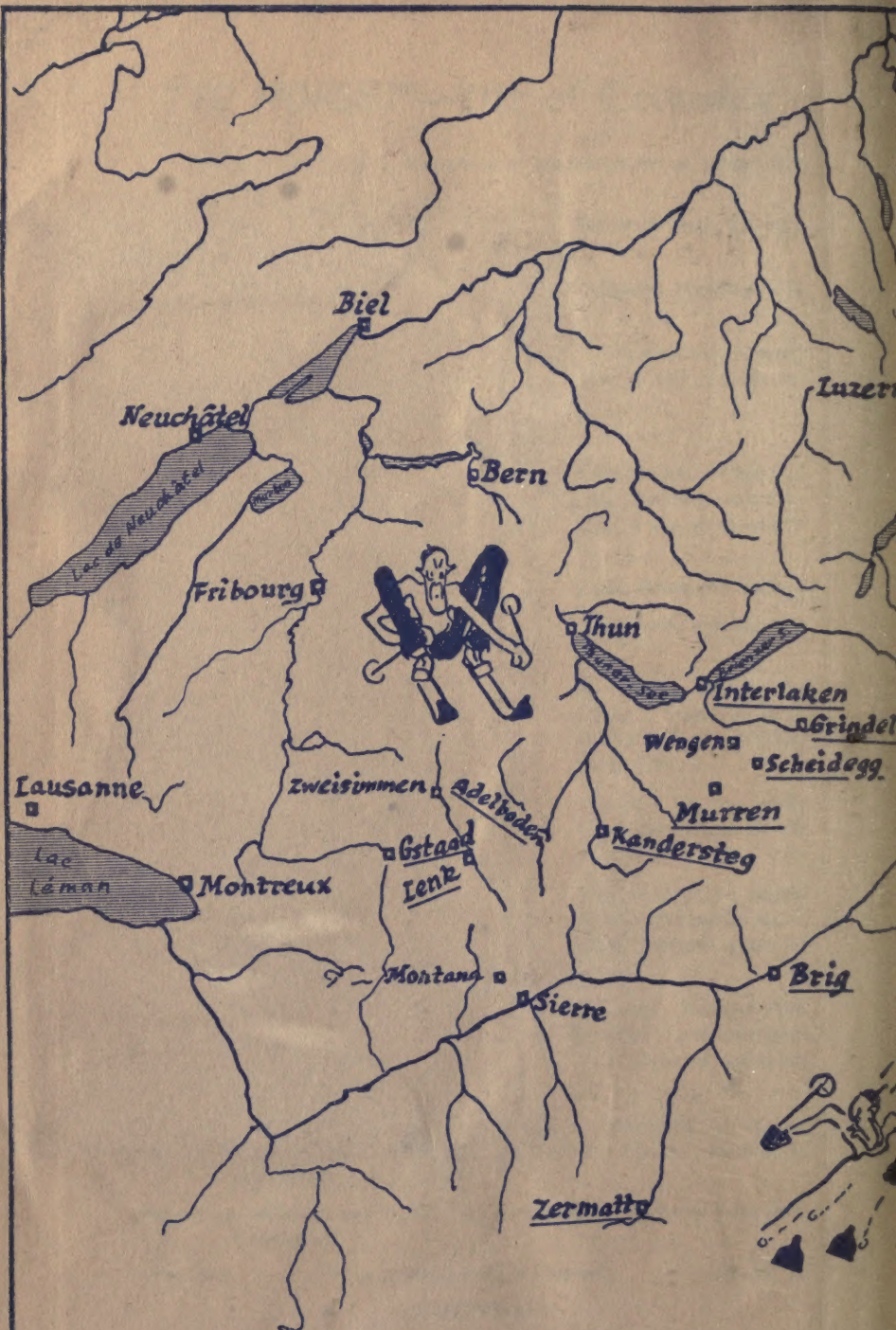
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